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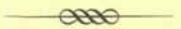

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Life is our dictionary.
—RALPH WALDO EMERSON, "The American Scholar," 1837

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Mementos

Carolyn Heilbrun's work has appeared four times in the SCHOLAR: once in the sixties, once in the seventies, once in the eighties, and now—just in the nick of time—in the nineties. We hope we don't have to wait another decade for a successor to "Contemporary Memoirs," an inquiry into why men grumble about memoirs by women. Just to turn expectations on their heads, we decided to publish the essay in the same issue as three memoirs by men. Jamie James's reminiscence is set in Oxford, Mississippi; Michael Bérubé's at an Illinois roller hockey rink; and Lionel Basney's at a camp meeting in rural New York State. All take place in the summer and, ideally, should be read outside, on a very hot day, with a pitcher of iced tea at hand.

The National Magazine Awards are presented annually by the American Society of Magazine Editors. As *Media Week* put it this year (rather uncharitably, we thought), "Four publications were up for Feature Writing: *Esquire, GQ, The New Yorker* and a tiny publication nobody had heard of."

The award went to Clara Claiborne Park for "Exiting Nirvana," an essay that appeared in the Spring 1998 issue of the tiny publication nobody had heard of. "Exiting Nirvana" is a profile of Jessy Park, Clara's thirty-nine-year-old daughter, an artist who has been autistic since early childhood. The citation calls the essay "an illuminating look into what is essentially a closed world." As befits our tininess, or at least our tiny budget, we toasted Clara with New Mexico sparkling wine instead of Moët & Chandon. Then she hoisted her Ellie (that pointy thing pictured above: the award is a reproduction of a bronze elephant by Alexander Calder) and, dodging the limousines massed outside the Waldorf-Astoria, set off on foot for the Port Authority terminal to catch the 5:15 Bonanza bus home to Williamstown, Massachusetts.

The SCHOLAR was also a finalist for General Excellence in the category of magazines with a circulation under 100,000. The citation read, in part, "Who can't love a magazine that proudly proclaims that in all of 1998 it never printed the two words *Monica Lewinsky?*"

A. F.

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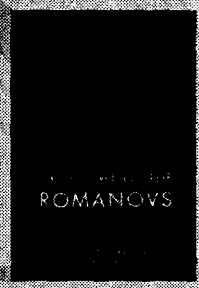

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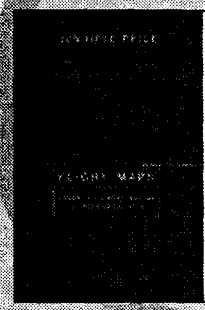

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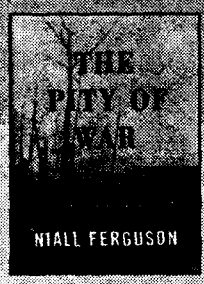

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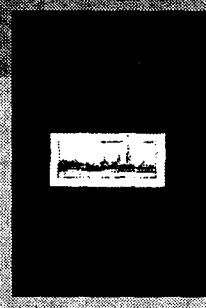

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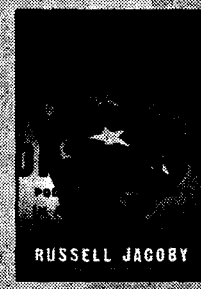

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AT LARGE AND AT SMALL

Procrustes and the Culture Wars

PHILONOË

Of all the serial killers who plied their trade in ancient Attica, Procrustes exercised the highest degree of professional ingenuity. "This man," wrote Diodorus Siculus, "used to take passing travelers and throw them upon a certain bed. When they were too big for it, he lopped off the overhanging parts of their bodies. When they were too small, he stretched them out by the feet." In Apollodorus's version, Procrustes had two beds, one large (on which he laid the short men, and hammered them until they were tall) and one small (on which he laid the tall men, and sawed them until they were short). Hyginus also belonged to the two-bed school, although he had Procrustes stretch his shorter victims by suspending anvils from their limbs. Whatever the furniture arrangement, everyone agreed that Procrustes' house was conveniently located on the road to Athens, and that when he offered his hospitality to footsore wayfarers, he was rarely refused.

Most later writers, including Plutarch, aligned themselves with Diodorus, perhaps believing (as do I) that a single bed for all comers was better suited to Procrustes' one-size-fits-all philosophy. I like to think, in fact, that the host was the *only* man who was exactly the right size for his bed, and that his unorthodox etiquette was a way of enforcing a solipsistic conformity: It fits me; therefore, everyone should fit it.

The Procrustean bed, Diodorus model, suggests itself with dispiriting aptness as a metaphor for the Culture Wars, right down to the blandishments with which Procrustes must have lured his guests over the threshhold. (I picture him as a handsome fellow with a large vocabulary and an oleaginous tongue, not unlike the chairmen of many English departments.) There's only one crucial difference. Sometimes Procrustes lopped off his victims, and sometimes he stretched them, but the Culture Wars only lop off. I have never seen cultural politics enlarge a work of literature, only diminish it.

By the Culture Wars, of course, I mean that peculiar development of the last two decades or so that takes culture—a multidimensional thing if there ever was one—and attempts to compress it to a skinny little line running from left to right. No matter how oddly shaped a book or a play or a poem is—no matter how idiosyncratic, how ambivalent, how anarchic, how complicated, how big, how messy—it's just got to fit that Procrustean bed. So out comes the handsaw, and WHOP! With a few quick strokes, it's cut down to size and, in the process, as a kind of casual side effect, murdered.

Both armies in the Culture Wars are eager to recruit new soldiers for this limb-attenuation campaign. Here's how you enlist. Without giving it much thought, you toe the party line—once. You think you've signed your name to just the top page, but then you discover that there are a thousand pieces of carbon paper underneath, transferring your signature with perfect fidelity to a thousand different documents. With your collusion, cultural politics has become, in the words of the eighteenth-century poet David Mallet, a

> Tyrant! more cruel than Procrustes old;
> Who, to his iron-bed, by torture fits,
> Their nobler part, the souls of suffering wits.

You have lost your right to judge literary works on a case-by-case basis, and those works have

---

This essay is adapted from talks given to the Phi Beta Kappa chapters of Yale, Harvard, the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, and Gettysburg College.

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lost whatever nuances were lodged in their overhanging periphery.

Reader, turn in your handsaw! You need not become a conscientious objector—there are plenty of ideas worth shedding blood for—but if in every battle you look around and see the same people fighting alongside you, you should ask yourself whether you are demonstrating an admirable constancy or a Procrustean intransigence. I do not suggest that the attractions of a single set of marching orders are easy to resist. It is far more work to start from scratch every time you open a book than to let someone else make up your mind for you before you begin. But if you start hacking the toes off your culture, you will soon look down and find that your own toes—those humble appendages, given to blisters and bunions and ingrown nails, yet so essential to your balance—are unaccountably missing.

There are dozens of questions currently being debated in the Culture Wars. I propose to discuss four particularly elementary ones, all concerning the literary canon. I do not expect everyone to agree with me, but I do hope to show that it is possible for a single person to entertain some ostensibly liberal views and some ostensibly conservative views and some utterly ambivalent views, and that such inconsistency can have a wonderfully dulling effect on the blade of Procrustes' handsaw.

Should we read great books because of their literary value or because they provide moral lessons—that is, because they teach us how to live?

When David Denby returned to audit Columbia's Western Civilization course at the age of forty-eight, his professor told the students on the first day of class, "You're here for very selfish reasons. You're here to build a self." That's a pretty clear statement of the moral-lesson school.

Here's Hannah Arendt: "The trouble with the educated philistine was not that he read the classics, but that he did so prompted by the ulterior motive of self-perfection, remaining quite unaware of the fact that Shakespeare or Plato might have to tell him more important things than how to educate himself." That's a pretty clear statement of the literary school.

My view is that being forced to choose between the two is a senseless act of sadomasochism that injures both reader and book. College students—over whose souls most of the goriest battles in the Culture Wars are fought—are, by virtue of their youth, deeply engrossed in character building. Is it wrong to enlist the help of Shakespeare and Plato in this difficult task? But if that's all that young readers do, then narcissism *(Should I emulate Tybalt or Mercutio? If I liberate my soul from dependence on my body, as the* Phaedo *suggests, can I still have sex with my boyfriend?)* trumps aesthetics, and great books are reduced, by a process that trims away all the most beautiful parts, to self-help manuals.

These days, it is mostly the people who consider themselves to be on the cultural left who ally themselves with the self-builders, and it is those on the right who accuse the self-builders of shallow egotism. This just shows how fickle the whole right-to-left spectrum is, for the self-building position used to be considered conservative. It was Matthew Arnold, that well-known revolutionary firebrand, who wrote "that poetry is at bottom a criticism of life; that the greatness of a poet lies in his powerful and beautiful application of ideas to life,—to the question: How to live." Whatever critical cycle we happen to have been born into, reading with only one motive in mind seems unnecessarily restrictive. However, to those who insist on a single path, I would recommend self-building. They will miss a great deal, but they will miss even more if their reading is a disembodied intellectual experience that has been carefully divorced from their own lives.

People who have concentrated on self-building haven't turned out so badly. Consider the example of Vice-Admiral James Stockdale, Ross Perot's running mate, whose favorite book was the *Enchiridion* of Epictetus. Judging from Stockdale's incoherence in the 1992 vice-presidential debates, I think it's fair to say that he didn't learn much about literary style from Epictetus. However, he did learn something about Arnold's "powerful and beautiful application of ideas to life."

Stockdale first read the *Enchiridion* at the age of thirty-eight, when the navy sent him to Stanford to study international relations, and Philip Rhinelander, the Dean of Humanities and Sciences, invited him to take his philosophy course. Stockdale did so, received supplementary tutoring from Rhinelander, and found

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himself drawn to the Stoics. Rhinelander mentioned that Frederick the Great had always brought a copy of the *Enchiridion* on his military campaigns, so when Stockdale was sent to Vietnam, he took along the copy his professor had given him during their last meeting. In September of 1966, Stockdale's plane was hit by flak over North Vietnam, and as he was descending by parachute, knowing he was about to become a prisoner of war, he said to himself, "I'm leaving the world of technology and entering the world of Epictetus." I would venture a guess that this is the first time a parachutist has thought about first-century Stoic philosophy on the way down. Of course, Stockdale didn't have a copy of the *Enchiridion* with him, but he hardly needed to, since by that time he had the book virtually memorized.

Epictetus, born as a slave in Phrygia and sold to Nero's secretary, is said to have once murmured quietly to his master, Epaphroditus, who was twisting his leg, "You will break it." When the leg broke, he said with a smile, "Did I not tell you that you would do so?" Stockdale contemplated this incident during eight years as a prisoner of war, four of which were spent in solitary confinement and two in leg irons. He also pondered the following passages, among others:

> Work, therefore, to be able to say to every harsh appearance, "You are but an appearance, and not absolutely the thing you appear to be." And then examine it by those rules which you have, and first, and chiefly, by this: whether it concerns the things which are in our own control, or those which are not; and, if it concerns anything not in our control, be prepared to say that it is nothing to you.
>
> Sickness is a hindrance to the body, but not to your ability to choose, unless that is your choice. Lameness is a hindrance to the leg, but not to your ability to choose.
>
> Let death and exile, and all other things which appear terrible be daily before your eyes, but chiefly death, and you will never entertain any abject thought, nor too eagerly covet anything.
>
> Upon all occasions we ought to have these [words of Socrates] ready at hand: . . . "O Crito, if it thus pleases the gods, thus let it be. Anytus and Melitus may kill me indeed, but hurt me they cannot."

It was in this way that, through fifteen episodes of torture, Stockdale was able to preserve the self that Epictetus had helped him build. When Stockdale was released by Hanoi in 1973, he was lame, just as Epictetus was when he was released from slavery in Rome, but, like his exemplar, he believed that his external suffering had failed to destroy his internal sense of freedom. I can think of worse ways to use literature.

Should the life of the writer affect our valuation of the work? In other words, if the writer was a stinker, do we boot the book out of the canon? Or, as the *New York Times Magazine* put it in an article about Herman Melville, "Forget the whale. The big question is: Did he beat his wife?"

No one will ever be certain, but according to family rumors, long suppressed by scholars who wished to protect Melville's reputation, he chased his wife, Elizabeth, around the table with a carving knife and once, when drunk, pushed her down the back stairs. At the very least, he made her so miserable that in 1867, her family made abortive plans to help her escape her marriage via a feigned kidnapping. Even Hershel Parker, Melville's most devoted biographer, admitted to Philip Weiss, the author of the *Times* article, "One of the great-grandchildren told me a story that Melville came home once with a bag of oranges and ate them by himself in front of his daughter." That's not the sort of crime that lands a man in jail, but Melville's daughter was *hungry*, and after you hear a few stories like that, it is no longer possible to think of Melville as someone you'd like to invite to supper.

But should we forget the whale? That is, if Melville did push Lizzie down the stairs, should the stock of *Moby-Dick* experience a parallel plummet? In similar fashion, we now know that Byron committed incest and pedophilia, T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound were anti-Semites, and Philip Larkin was a more democratic sort of bigot (he hated almost everybody). Should their poetry be permanently tainted by their character deficiencies?

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These questions seem to me to be intertwined with the question of whether we should read great books for their literary merit or for the purpose of self-building, and to provide a compelling argument for doing both. Those who believe that the purpose of literature is primarily moral are going to run into trouble if the book they've been using as a guide to living turns out to have been written by someone who beat his wife. I'm sure it mattered to James Stockdale that Epictetus was by all reports an exemplary man—that he chose to live in a small hut furnished only with a bed and a lamp, that he adopted a child whom a friend was too poor to care for. It would have been acutely disturbing to find out, for example, that Epictetus had abused that child.

Unsurprisingly, it is the self-builders who tend to place a great deal of emphasis on biography and who vote to expel someone from the canon if he or she turns out to have been an unsavory character. But if you believe, as I do, that great literature can be written by bad people, then your library can remain intact, no matter how much respect you lose for the authors as individuals.

Some readers feel that the life is irrelevant and *only* the work counts. A friend schooled in the New Criticism recently wrote me: "As a critic I was trained to ignore the biography of the author. We figured he knew what he was doing; it was our job to figure it out. To slide into biographical details was to admit a lack of critical perception. Let the work stand for the man." I disagree. For instance, if you know that Melville was a terrible husband, you may be able to make more sense of the sealed-off, seabound world of *Moby-Dick,* where everybody was male, even the whale. And even if there are no themes in the work that resonate with the life, great writers are not machines that produce, out of nothingness, a series of words that happen to be more perfect than other people's words; they are flawed mortals, often imprudent and uncivil, who are so large (that's what greatness *is*: size) that every part of them deserves to be understood.

Should a book be demoted if its plot fails to meet standards of behavior that have changed since it was written?

A couple of years ago, I read a letter to the *New York Times Book Review* in which Sharon Uemura Ronholt of Stockton, California, berated Richard Jenkyns for his review of Robert Fagles's translation of the *Odyssey.* She wrote, "Nowhere in his review does Mr. Jenkyns draw critical attention to the fact that Homer's world is that of a quintessential male fantasy and may not meet with universal approbation. Homer's hero commits adultery with various gorgeous, high-class women, and the construction of the plot (his desire to depart for 'home') legitimizes his callous abandonment of his ever-changing women lovers." Ms. Ronholt therefore concluded that it was naïve and, as she termed it, "pre-theoretical" to accept the *Odyssey* as "a 'timeless' Great Book."

Sharon Uemura Ronholt put her finger on the paradox that women, or indeed anyone who is currently better off than he or she would have been in another century or another place, will always feel when reading works from other times or cultures. But she didn't see it as a paradox, a word that suggests ambivalence; she saw it as an unambiguous black mark against the *Odyssey.*

Whenever I read Homer, I see ample evidence that women were treated abominably in ancient Greece, and I am very thankful that I live now and not then. In fact, I would rather pay a visit to Procrustes than marry any of Homer's heroes. Fortunately, none of them is asking me. The invitation Homer offers me is a far broader one, and that is to enter a world that was very different from ours, but that in its own "pre-theoretical" way possessed nobility and beauty. If I had to step into a polling booth and vote on Homer's sexual politics, I'd pull the NO lever strenuously. I am therefore very glad that the *Odyssey* is a poem and not a referendum.

I would guess that Ms. Ronholt doesn't much like *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,* either. If you're on the cultural right these days, you're supposed to think it's a masterpiece—the book from which, as Ernest Hemingway said, all modern American literature has come. (Of course, if you were on the cultural right a century ago, you would probably have disliked the book and considered its author—a muckraker who had uncovered political corruption in San Francisco and would denounce King Leopold's regime in the Congo—an untrustworthy radical. A month af-

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ter publication, *Huckleberry Finn* was banished from the public library in Concord, Massachusetts, on the ground that it was "trash and suitable only for the slums.")

If you're on the cultural left today, you're supposed to think that *Huckleberry Finn* should be expunged from the reading lists of America's high schools, partly because it contains the word *nigger* and partly because nineteenth-century progressives don't sound like late-twentieth-century progressives. In a controversial 1996 article in *Harper's* called "Say It Ain't So, Huck," Jane Smiley wrote that she was "stunned" by the idea "that this is a great novel, that this is even a serious novel." According to Smiley, one of the book's disqualifying flaws is Huck's decision to take Jim down the Mississippi River instead of across it to Illinois. She sees this as a moral failure on Huck's part, and therefore on Mark Twain's part as well.

"So Jane Smiley would have crossed the Mississippi to the free state of Illinois with her Jim and freed him without delay," responded a reader named Anson J. Cameron. (Mr. Cameron comes from Port Melbourne, Australia, and may thus be above the American fray.)

> And if she kept her description of the river and the Southern sky to a minimum and the dialogue to just a few mutterings from her Huck about how many slaveholders' houses he was set to raze, she could probably free Jim inside of a page. Now, supposing she could keep writing (and Huck could keep rowing) at this pace, she might invent and free upwards of three hundred slaves in the course of her *Huck Finn*, whereas Twain, farting around with humor and other such distractions, only got around to freeing one.

I'm with Mr. Cameron. I'm very grateful that Huck Finn and Mark Twain were too inefficient and immoral to stop their book on page forty-three. (And that Homer didn't send Odysseus straight home.)

What should you do when a work's language leaves you out? If the very words exclude you—because, for instance, they are addressed to men and you are a woman—should you stick out your tongue and say, "Well, if that's the way you feel about it, I reject you, too"?

Consider, for example, "The American Scholar," the Harvard Phi Beta Kappa oration from which this journal draws its name. On August 31, 1837, Ralph Waldo Emerson spoke for an hour and a quarter in the Brattle Street Church in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on the necessity of establishing an independent American intellectual tradition that did not draw its sustenance from "the sere remains of foreign harvests." Some members of the audience were unimpressed. Edward Everett Hale went home and wrote in his diary that Emerson was "half-crazy" and that his speech was "not very good and very transcendental." But James Russell Lowell called the event "a scene to be always treasured in the memory for its picturesqueness and its inspiration." And when Thomas Carlyle was sent a copy, he wrote to Emerson, "I coul[d have] *wept* to read that speech; the clear high melody of it went tingling thro' my heart; I said to my wife 'There, woman!' She read; and returned and charges me to return for answer, 'that there had been nothing met with like it since Schiller went silent.' My brave Emerson!"

The day I learned I was to be associated with this journal, I ran to my bookcase, took down a volume of my brave Emerson, and opened it to "The American Scholar." I expected, like Carlyle, to hear a clear high melody tingling thro' my heart. Instead, I read the following sentence: "In the right state [the scholar] is *Man Thinking.*" This is the most famous line in the essay; it was used as THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR's epigraph until 1976. On previous readings, I had skated over the phrase, assuming that "Man" was one of those capacious linguistic tents that had once had room for everybody, the way *horsemanship* included horsewomanship and *mankind* included womankind.

On this reading, however, I could see that Emerson really meant *Man* Thinking. Later in his speech he specifically distinguished the scholar from the "protected class" of "children and women"; they lived under a different tent. So what lesson was I to draw? Even though Emerson supported women's property rights, and counted Margaret Fuller and Harriet Martineau among his friends, and didn't complain when his wife served leg of lamb twenty days in a row, was I nonetheless compelled to write him off as a wicked misogynist and cast

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from my bookshelf the very speech that gave THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR its name? No.

But if I left the speech *on* my shelf, did that mean I was forever excluded from the Emersonian fellowship, forced to press my nose against the glass of American intellectual life, as if the Man Thinking Club were a beer-swilling fraternity that invited me on the premises only on Saturday night? No.

One of the convenient things about literature is that, despite copyright laws—which in Emerson's case expired long ago—a book belongs to the reader as well as to the writer. The greater the work, the wider the ownership, which is why there are such things as criticism, revisionism, and Ph.D. dissertations. I will not ask the sage of Concord to rewrite his oration. He will forever retain the right to speak his own words and to mean what he wished to mean, not what I would wish him to mean. But I will retain the right to recast Man Thinking in *my* mind as Curious People Thinking, because 162 years have passed, and the tent has grown larger.

As we wrangle with these canonic questions, it may be useful to remember that this is not the first Culture War. In seventeenth-century France, Boileau and La Fontaine exchanged a famous series of barbs with Fontenelle and Perrault in the Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes, a dispute over which was superior, classical or modern literature. The "Ancients" argued that Greece and Rome provided the only worthy literary models; the "Moderns" argued that if Descartes had improved on ancient science, his literary contemporaries might improve on ancient poetry. The quarrel spread across the Channel to England, where Sir William Temple took up the ancient cause, William Wotton took up the modern cause, and Swift satirized them both in *A Full and True Account of the BATTEL Fought last FRIDAY, Between the* Antient *and the* Modern *BOOKS in St. JAMES'S LIBRARY.*

"The present quarrel," wrote Swift, "is so inflamed by the warm heads of either faction, and the pretensions *somewhere or other* so exorbitant, as not to admit the least overtures of accommodation. This quarrel first began (as I have heard it affirmed by an old dweller in the neighbourhood) about a small spot of ground, lying and being upon one of the two tops of the hill Parnassus. . . ." The higher Parnassian summit was occupied by the Ancients, the lower by the Moderns. The Moderns, deciding that the Ancient peak was blocking their view, suggested that their neighbors either decamp to a lower altitude or permit the Moderns to carry over a few shovels and "level the said hill as low as they shall think it convenient." The Ancients declined; the Moderns were indignant; and a war broke out in which

> whole rivulets of ink have been exhausted, and the virulence of both parties enormously augmented. Now, it must here be understood that ink is the great missive weapon in all battles of the learned, which, conveyed through a sort of engine called a quill, infinite numbers of these are darted at the enemy by the valiant on each side, with equal skill and violence, as if it were an engagement of porcupines.

According to Swift, the Parnassian turf battle produced a series of quarrelsome books, "known to the world under several names, as *disputes, arguments, rejoinders, brief considerations, answers, replies, remarks, reflections, objections, confutations,*" that, when admitted to libraries, soon found themselves continuing the fray, this time over the more general question of merit. The conflict was bloody but spectacularly incompetent. Aristotle aimed an arrow at Bacon but instead shot Descartes in the eye; Cowley dropped his shield and was sliced in half by Pindar. Swift never revealed which side won: for could anything but a stalemate result from demanding that the world's readers choose A or B, not A and B, or A, B, C, and Z? That binary view of culture was just as reductive in 1697 as it is now, when the battle between the Ancients and Moderns is still raging (except that Aristotle and Bacon now find themselves fighting on the same side and being commanded to take potshots at Virginia Woolf).

The rivulets of ink still flow, and the battlefields of the Culture Wars are still strewn with corpses. "Anger and fury," observed Swift, "though they add strength to the sinews of the body, yet are found to relax those of the mind." The anger is real, but I believe that our wars, like Swift's, are a fiction: a theoretical—or, as Sharon Uemura Ronholt would put it, a "post-

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theoretical"—construct that would appall many of the writers over whose words the armies of the left and the right are battling.

In order to analyze their strategies, let us return, in a pre-theoretical way, to Procrustes—or rather to his nemesis, Theseus. It was Theseus who slew Procrustes on his own bed, though it is not recorded whether he stretched his ungracious host or lopped him off. Procrustes was not the only unpleasant character that Theseus encountered while he was walking from the Peloponnesus to Athens. There were five others, and it seems to me that, with a little Procrustean stretching, they might represent the various hazards you are likely to encounter as a late-twentieth-century wayfarer wending your way through the obstacle course of the Culture Wars.

The first rogue was Periphetes the Club-Bearer, who had the ungallant habit of beating travelers to death with a giant bronze club. Theseus, never known for his subtlety, grabbed the club himself and bashed Periphetes over the head with it. Theseus was apparently so pleased with this club that he stole it and carried it around with him for the rest of his life. This encounter reminds me of how the right berated the left for politicizing culture, and then appropriated the weapon of politicization in order to bash the left over the head with it. I don't recommend that you follow suit.

The second was named Sinis the Pine-Bender. Sinis liked to bend two trees down to the ground, tie his victim to them, and let go. The trees sprang back in opposite directions, and the victim was torn in two. Surely these two trees are none other than the political poles, each pantingly eager to embrace you, with the danger that you, too, will end up in pieces.

Theseus dispatched Sinis with his own dichotomous trees, and then, after persuading Sinis's daughter that he would treat her honorably, he seduced, impregnated, and abandoned her. It's no wonder that the next challenge Theseus encountered was an angry female: the Wild Sow of Crommyon, a large and ill-mannered pig who was rampaging around the countryside, devouring people. Who could the Wild Sow be but every male academic's nightmare of the enraged feminist who he fears will get tenure instead of him? Theseus responded to the Wild Sow of Crommyon as we would all like to respond to our secret fears: he killed her.

After she was out of way, he met a murderer named Sciron. Sciron liked his visitors to wash his feet, and when the ablution was complete, he kicked them off a cliff into the Saronic Gulf, where they were eaten by a giant turtle. Sciron could be none other than the forces who want you to take books that have always been an intimate part of your life, such as *Huckleberry Finn,* and kick them out of the canon. The giant turtle would make the Huck critics particularly happy, because if Huck Finn were not only banished but actually digested, there would be no danger of his ever creeping back into the canon.

After Theseus got rid of Sciron, he met Cercyon the Wrestler, whom of course he outwrestled. I like to think of Cercyon as your own conscience, with which you will often wrestle as you grapple with these slippery and vexing questions of culture and morality. I hope, however, that, unlike Theseus, you do not choke your conscience to death.

Now let us imagine that, as a modern-day Theseus negotiating the thorny path of cultural politics, you have somehow managed to resist all these dangers, perhaps with a shade more finesse and less violence than your predecessor. Athens is still far away, and you are exhausted. What do you think you would long for most in all the world?

A bed, of course.

And that is just what Procrustes offers you. A soft bed, I am sure, with 300-thread-count cotton sheets, a high-loft duvet, and goose-down pillows.

Don't lie down.

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It is time now for the great act. A transversal cleft makes its appearance on the forehead, at the bottom of the perforating diadem; a second, but longitudinal slit divides the skull in two and extends down the thorax. Through this cross-shaped opening, the Anthrax suddenly appears, all moist with the humors of life's laboratory. She steadies herself upon her trembling legs, dries her wings and takes to flight, leaving at the window of the cell her nymphal slough, which keeps intact for a very long period. The sad-coloured Fly has five or six weeks before her, wherein to explore the clay nests amid the thyme and to take her small share of the joys of life.

—HENRI FABRE
The Life of the Fly, *1913*

Free now of mortals, the Firebird dances alone. The stage is completely dark save for the light that follows her. She rises on point, extends one leg straight out, and whips the air in daring turns. The mysterious eerie forest of Ivan's adventure becomes serene as she sets all at peace with graceful, birdlike movement. Her mission over, the Firebird moves across the stage in a flowing dance, now turning, now stepping softly. Her feet tremble to release her body back into the air. Compelled to leave the earth, she moves away, her body thrown back. The last we see of her is her golden hand fluttering against the dark curtain at the side of the stage.

—GEORGE BALANCHINE
and FRANCIS MASON
on The Firebird, *composed by Igor Stravinsky and choreographed by Michel Fokine, June 1910*

SUCCESS. FOUR FLIGHTS THURSDAY MORNING. ALL AGAINST TWENTY-ONE-MILE WIND. STARTED FROM LEVEL WITH ENGINE POWER ALONE. AVERAGE SPEED THROUGH AIR THIRTY-ONE MILES. LONGEST FIFTY-NINE SECONDS. INFORM PRESS. HOME CHRISTMAS.

—WILBUR and ORVILLE WRIGHT
telegram to the Reverend Milton Wright, sent from Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, December 17, 1903

COMMONPLACE BOOK

Flight

COLLECTED BY
ANDRÉ BERNARD

With a prophetic instinct for the proper time to migrate, birds as a rule anticipate the storms that usually prevail on their way to and from a warmer climate. They are conscious of the fact that autumn follows summer (when they are strongest and their plumage is at its best) and that after these seasons comes winter—the time they dread most. They are instinctively aware of the proper date of departure for avoiding the winds to which they may be exposed in their wanderings and . . . usually are able to choose a period of mild and favoring winds. North winds, either lateral or from the rear, are favorable, and they wait for them with the same sagacity that sailors exhibit when at sea.

—EMPEROR FREDERICK II
De Arte Venandi cum Avibus, *1245*

Over and over again on the second day of my flight, I would return to mental alertness sufficiently to realize that I had been flying while I was neither asleep nor awake. My eyes had been open. I had responded to my instruments' indications and held generally to compass course, but I had lost sense of circumstance and time. During immeasurable periods, I seemed to extend outside my plane and body, independent of worldly values, appreciative of beauty, form, and color without depending upon my eyes. It was an experience in which both the intellectual and sensate were replaced by what might be termed a matterless awareness. It was the only occasion in my life when I saw and conversed with ghosts.

—CHARLES LINDBERGH
on flying The Spirit of St. Louis *to France, July 1927, in* Autobiography of Values, *1978*

When the skies are filled with black vapors, when fog and sand and sea are confounded in a brew in which they become indistinguishable, when gleaming flashes wheel treacherously in these skyey swamps, the pilot purges himself of the phantoms at a single stroke. He lights his lamps. He brings sanity

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into his house as into a lonely cottage on a fearsome heath. And the crew travel a sort of submarine route in a lighted chamber.

—ANTOINE DE SAINT-EXUPÉRY
Wind, Sand and Stars, *1939*

"Jupiter descends in Thunder and lightning, sitting uppon an Eagle: hee throws a Thunder-bolt. The Ghostes fall on their knees." [*Stage directions for* Cymbeline, *Act V, Scene iv.*] Some details are noteworthy in connection with Jupiter's descent. For one thing, he came only part-way down: the eagle's foot apparently came no lower than the heads of the apparitions on the stage. For another, his visit lasted for twenty lines, which seems to have been the average for a visit from above, and his return to heaven needed six, from his "Mount, eagle" to Sicillius's "The marble pavement closes." This latter fact suggests that some six lines were needed to cover the time required to raise an adult actor from a point perhaps seven feet above the outer stage into the heavens, and to close the trap door.

—IRWIN SMITH
on the mechanics of flight in Shakespeare's Globe Playhouse in 1610

If about a dozen genera of birds were to become extinct, who would have ventured to surmise that birds might have existed which used their wings solely as flappers, like the logger-headed duck (Micropterus of Eyton); as fins in the water and as front-legs on the land, like the penguin; as sails, like the ostrich; and functionally for no purpose, like the Apteryx? Yet the structure of each of these birds is good for it, under the conditions of life to which it is exposed, for each has to live by a struggle; but it is not necessarily the best possible under all possible conditions.

—CHARLES DARWIN
The Origin of Species, *1859*

During this time, the astronauts can't see anything, and everything's changing so fast that the descent has to be done automatically. At around 35,000 feet the shuttle slows down to less than the speed of sound, and the steering can be done manually, if necessary. But at 4,000 feet something happens that is not done by the computer: the pilot pushes a button to lower the landing gear. I found that very odd—a kind of silliness having to do with the psychology of pilots: they're heroes in the eyes of the public; everybody has the idea that they're steering the shuttle around, whereas the truth is they don't have to do anything until they push that button to lower the landing gear. They can't stand the idea that they really have nothing to do.

—RICHARD P. FEYNMAN
on space shuttle flights, in What Do You Care What Other People Think?, *1988*

The wings are small and must beat rapidly—nearly 200 times per second—to keep the bee aloft. The body temperature of a resting bumblebee, as of other insects, is generally indistinguishable from the air temperature. To fly, the bee must raise the temperature of its muscles considerably, so that the wings can be moved rapidly enough to generate the necessary lift and thrust for flight. To do this, it shivers.

—BERND HEINRICH
Bumblebee Economics, *1979*

As I write, highly civilized human beings are flying overhead, trying to kill me. . . . Most of them, I have no doubt, are kind-hearted law-abiding men who would never dream of committing murder in private life. On the other hand, if one of them succeeds in blowing me to pieces with a well-placed bomb, he will never sleep any the worse for it. He is serving his country, which has the power to absolve him from evil.

—GEORGE ORWELL
England Your England, *1941*

We were not allowed to leave the lot. So this airport was built on a stage with a cutout airplane. And, obviously, we fogged in the set not so much to give it atmosphere but because we had to conceal the fact that everything was so phony. We finally positioned the plane, which was, I thought, a pretty bad cutout, as far away as we dared. And we had no way to give it any perspective. And it occurred to me to hire a bunch of midgets to portray the mechanics. To give it a forced perspective. And it worked.

—LEE KATZ
assistant director of Casablanca, *on filming the final scenes, July 1942*

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CARL SANDBURG

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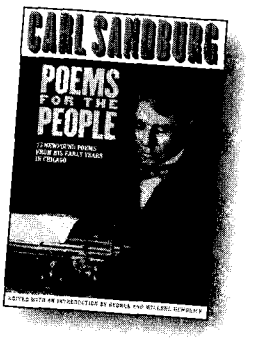

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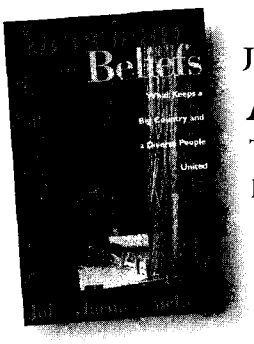

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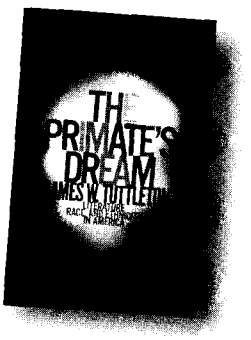

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My Faulkner

JAMIE JAMES

Over my desk there hangs a portrait of a little boy and a little girl seated on a blue velvet sofa. The boy is wearing short pants and a blue striped necktie; the girl has bangs and what appear to be far too many tiny teeth. It isn't a terrible painting, but it's not very good. The subjects smile insipidly at the viewer, and there is no discernible, or at least no successful, attempt at psychological insight into the subjects. They are simply likenesses, executed in the early thirties, when the photographic studio was supplanting the amateur painter as the popular portraitist in America. As an art critic, I would say that the most successful part of the painting is the wallpaper behind the sofa, a pale pink floral pattern, gracefully done. If I were to take this picture to a dealer, he would probably send me to a flea market, where I would be lucky to get a hundred dollars for it.

Yet I would not sell that painting for any price: the little girl is my mother, and the artist was William Faulkner's mother. (The little boy, as you might surmise, is my uncle.) I met Miss Maud Falkner on many occasions. She lived across the street from my grandparents' house in Oxford, Mississippi, and would stop by from time to time, usually on errands such as the delivery of homemade pickle relish or the collecting of fig preserves. Lest I date myself more than I ought, I should point out that I was nine years old when she died, at the age of eighty-eight. Nonetheless, I have a vivid memory of her: she was a jolly little lady who always wore long, floral-patterned dresses with lace collars, as old ladies in the South did in those days. I'm sure she never said anything to me except to ask my age and whether I wanted candy.

Jamie James is a critic and travel writer based in New York and Bali, and the author of *The Music of the Spheres: Music, Science, and the Natural Order of the Universe; Pop Art;* and other books. He has contributed frequently to the *Atlantic Monthly, The New Yorker,* and other periodicals.

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You will have more interest in her son William. I never met him, but I saw him once, up close. The year was 1960. I was walking across the courthouse square in Oxford with my grandfather, who was in the process of retiring from the hardware business. Pop nudged me and said, "There's Mr. Bill." The greatest American novelist of the twentieth century (hell, why not say it?) was shuffling across the courthouse square, visibly drunk, even to the eyes of an eight-year-old boy, at eleven o'clock in the morning. I'm sorry to say that, but it's true. Pop nodded his head at Faulkner and veered us away in a different direction.

I had just arrived in Oxford with my mother and sister for summer vacation, an event that had been reported in some detail in the town's newspaper, the *Oxford Eagle*. My father had to work, of course, and stayed home in Houston. He would come to join us later in the summer.

That was the only time I saw William Faulkner, but I knew many Falkners in addition to Miss Maud. (The novelist added that highfalutin *u* in 1918, when he joined the Royal Air Force of Canada.) I met his brother Johncy, who lived in a beautiful old white house on University Avenue, set way back from the street. My mother's best friend, Dot, was his first cousin, and her sons Mike and Jeff were my playmates when I came to Oxford. Two of Faulkner's closest friends, pallbearers at his funeral, were good friends of my grandparents: Phil Stone, a brilliant lawyer who was Faulkner's first and staunchest supporter, and W. McNeill ("Mac") Reed, who ran a pharmacy on the square, where Faulkner used to come to read the magazines on the racks and the books in the rental library. Every time I went to the square with my mother, we stopped at the Gathright-Reed pharmacy to visit Mac Reed, and he let me choose a candy bar.

The Oxford, Mississippi, that I visited when I was a boy had scarcely changed since Faulkner described it in the great Yoknapatawpha novels he wrote during the late twenties and thirties. I grew up in Houston, a booming metropolis that would soon be known as Space City, when NASA built its headquarters there. To me, Oxford was unbelievably quaint and old-timey. My grandparents' house was just a few blocks from the square, on South Lamar Boulevard, which was named after Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus Lamar, the author of Mississippi's ordinance of secession, who is buried in the Oxford cemetery. Their house, constructed of bricks made by slaves, was built shortly before the Civil War. It was furnished entirely with antiques from the house in Jackson where my grandmother grew up (Manship House, which was recently made into a museum). There were lace doilies on the tabletops and antimacassars on the backs of the armchairs.

The portrait of my mother and uncle once hung over the same blue sofa depicted in the painting, in a room called the parlor. Opposite the sofa was a rosewood piano with sixty-six ivory and ebony keys, and over it

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were two paintings. The one on the left showed a Confederate soldier leaving for war. The garden of the old homestead is in brilliant bloom, and the man's rosy-cheeked wife stands on the gallery, waving good-bye. The painting on the right shows the man returning from the war. He leans on his musket, dejected, in front of the deserted, burnt-out ruin of his house.

My grandparents' telephone number was 213, and when you picked up the receiver, a woman's voice came on the line and asked, "What number, please?" I remember accompanying my grandfather to the blacksmith's shop, a shed just a few blocks off the square, to have a pot repaired. We had to wait until a mule had been shod. Whenever we made ice cream (always peach), I rode with Pop to the icehouse to buy the crushed ice for the ice-cream maker. My grandparents had an electric refrigerator, but enough people still had iceboxes to support an icehouse. Now, I am sure there were lots of small towns in the United States in 1960 that had three-digit phone numbers, smithies, and icehouses, but in Houston everything was modern and new. We were going to have rocket ships! When I came to Oxford on those summer visits, I felt as if I were traveling back in time. And of course I was.

I knew, on that morning when I saw William Faulkner walking across the square, that he was a famous person. I had seen the mysterious, brilliantly colored parchment proclaiming his Nobel Prize, which was on permanent display at Oxford's tiny civic museum, along with the gold medal bearing Alfred Nobel's profile and a photograph of Faulkner with the king of Sweden. However, when one is eight the concept of fame is far from clear. The president was famous, Roy Rogers and Mickey Mantle were famous, but I wasn't at all sure what it meant that Miss Maud's son was famous. My mother explained that he was a famous novelist, but that didn't help at all. I had just begun to read the Hardy Boys mysteries, which kept me in a perpetual state of feverish suspense, but I didn't have the slightest interest in Franklin W. Dixon, the man who wrote them.

I suppose it was inevitable that when I began to read grown-up books, William Faulkner would become my favorite author. The first of his books that I read was *The Unvanquished.* It was a Signet paperback, with a watercolor on the cover of a long-haired boy clenching his fist, standing in front of a burning neoclassical house. I bought it at Blaylock's drugstore, on the south side of the square, directly across from the marble monument to the Confederate war dead. When I was a boy, I invariably signed my name on the first page of every book I owned (though who was going to steal my fifty-cent paperback of *The Unvanquished* is now a mystery to me). Judging by the childish loops on the *J*'s, I would guess that I was thirteen when I read it. It's minor Faulkner—more a group of stories strung together than a novel. Nonetheless, it was an excellent first

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Faulkner for a boy: the opening story, "Ambuscade," set during the Civil War, is narrated by a boy the same age I was when I read it.

Nine pages into the book, I read this sentence, in which young Bayard Sartoris and his black playmate Ringo listen to Bayard's father talk about the progress of the war: "We heard: the names—Forrest and Morgan and Barksdale and Van Dorn; the words like Gap and Run which we didn't have in Mississippi even though we did own Barksdale, and Van Dorn until somebody's husband killed him, and one day General Forrest rode down South Street in Oxford where there watched him though a window pane a young girl who scratched her name on it with a diamond ring: Celia Cook."

I already knew that story. I was only thirteen, but I was one up on William Faulkner. I knew it because my mother had told it to me. The incident Faulkner had appropriated for his tale had occurred at the old Tate house, which was next door to my grandparents'. The house burned down when my mother was a little girl, but somebody found the windowpane in the rubble, with the girl's name etched on it. South Lamar Boulevard must have been South Street then: L. Q. C. Lamar was still in the process of becoming a famous man, and the wide, paved boulevard that I knew must have been known in those days as plain South Street. At some point in the near future, an English teacher would explain to me that art imitates life, but she would be too late. I already understood the concept better than she possibly could: great art was imitating a vitally important part of my life, the world my mother grew up in.

The next Faulkner I read was *Intruder in the Dust.* I chose it because it was billed in the jacket copy (correctly) as a suspenseful mystery story. The protagonist, the amateur detective, was again a boy my age, Chick Mallison. *Intruder in the Dust* was heavier going than *The Unvanquished.* It was the real Faulkner thing: it had flashbacks that went on forever, sentences that went on forever, and words such as *abnegant* and *succumbence* that weren't in the dictionary. But the story was irresistible. I acquired the knack, so necessary to reading Faulkner, of letting go, of following him with the fierce tenacity of a faithful dog, just blindly reading on till he reveals the sense of what you're reading, in his own good time.

In 1949 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer released a film version of *Intruder in the Dust,* directed by Clarence Brown. I had never seen it before I began work on this essay: there weren't any big stars in the cast, so it never turned up on the Late Show, yet it wasn't arty enough for the revival houses. A few days ago, I rented the video. The movie was shot in Oxford just two years before I was born, so the courthouse square, where much of the action takes place, looks very much as I remembered it. The first scene of the movie is set in a barbershop, where word reaches the townsmen of Jefferson that Lucas Beauchamp has been arrested for shooting one of the Gowrie boys. Well, I knew that barbershop—it was Park's barber-

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shop, where Pop took me to get my hair cut any number of times.

That's cheating, I admit; it's a scene from an MGM movie, not really Faulkner, and thousands of men and boys had their hair cut at Park's barbershop. But the scenes in the office of lawyer John Stevens aren't cheating. In his screenplay, Ben Maddow changed the first name of Chick's uncle from Gavin to John, but the words he put into his mouth are reasonably faithful to the grandiloquent discourses of the character in the novel. Gavin Stevens, who later turns up as Faulkner's mouthpiece in *The Town* and *The Mansion,* was modeled, everyone agrees, on Phil Stone. I remember my grandmother taking me to his office on the square for a visit when I was a boy. I confess it's a dim memory, but, as I recall, it was rather a dim office. Uncle Phil, as he was known, was an impressively handsome man who was famous for his garrulity. I can't claim to remember anything he said, and I doubt that I understood much of it at the time, but I do remember the cadence: he talked on and on and on and on, just like Gavin Stevens. If my calculations are correct, I first read *Intruder in the Dust* in 1965, the year that Congress passed a bill to ensure that black people in the South had equal access to the ballot. My memories of Oxford are uniformly pleasant: I don't ever recall hearing the word *nigger* uttered in my presence by anyone I knew personally (though certainly it was on the lips of the uneducated country people I saw milling around the square). Or that's what I say: after thirty years, unpleasant memories have a way of conveniently sliding into oblivion. In any case, I make no representations about what was said beyond the earshot of a visiting child.

Indeed, the biggest trouble I ever got into with my grandfather was on account of Henry Jones, an ancient black man who lived with his wife, Mollie, in a ramshackle house behind my grandparents' place. He was probably the oldest person I ever met; if he wasn't born a slave, he couldn't have missed it by more than a few years. I was a little afraid of Henry: his eyes were always bloodshot, and his accent was so strong and he spoke in such a gravelly mumble that I couldn't understand a word of what he said. One day he walked up to the back door for a visit with Pop. The two old men chatted for a long time; I think I sort of lurked behind Pop's legs. After Henry left, Pop said sternly, "Young man, I'm ashamed of you." At first I thought he was joshing me—he often said that with a mock-severe tone when he was correcting me for some peccadillo or other. But this time he was really angry with me, and I didn't have any notion why. I hadn't said or done anything. That, it seemed, was my crime. Pop was ashamed of me because I hadn't shaken hands with Henry Jones. It seemed so unfair: I was just a little boy. How was I supposed to know that it was up to me to initiate the handshaking?

I didn't know the arcane rituals of racial etiquette in the South, because I wasn't quite, really, altogether Southern. What Southernness I

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possess is a maternal inheritance, the result of those summer visits to Oxford. True, Texas was a Confederate state—there had even been a battle over Galveston, in 1862—but Texas began as a sovereign nation, a status it has only theoretically abandoned. In my high school Texas history course (a requirement for the diploma), much greater emphasis was laid on Sam Houston and Davy Crockett and the Alamo than on the Civil War.

As I have said, in 1960 the city of Houston prided itself on being a progressive place, but that cannot be said of the state of Mississippi at that time. I don't recall any relics of Jim Crow in Houston, but as vivid a memory as any I have of Oxford is that of the separate water fountains for White and Colored in the main hallway of the courthouse. I didn't understand it, but I knew instinctively that it was one of those things that one couldn't ask the grown-ups about. At the Lyric movie theater, where Mike and Jeff and I used to go every week of the summer, regardless of what was showing, there were two entrances—one for the balcony, where the black people sat, and the main entrance, for the whites.

When I think about that now, it seems incomprehensible to me, utterly bizarre, so stupid. How could all those nice people I knew in Oxford have permitted such an unjust system to persist? That, of course, was Faulkner's subject, and no American writer since Mark Twain has had a better one. I don't mean to imply that race was his only subject—there was really nothing that wasn't Faulkner's subject—but those sentimental paintings of the Confederate soldier hanging over my grandmother's piano have helped me to understand Faulkner better than any book of scholarship or criticism about him that I have read. Old times there are not forgotten: look away, look away, look away, Dixie Land.

By the time I was twenty, I had read most of the great novels: *The Sound and the Fury, As I Lay Dying, Light in August, Go Down, Moses.* I don't think I made it all the way through *Absalom, Absalom!* until a few years later. In my late twenties, I conducted a systematic reading of everything else (except *Sartoris,* the first Yoknapatawpha novel—I didn't get around to that one). I have them all piled on my desk now. Except for a few junky paperbacks to plug the gaps, I was a snob about wanting to have the old Random House hardcovers. They are such handsome, well-produced books. My copy of *The Reivers,* Faulkner's last novel, is a first edition: it was my grandmother's. She bought it when it first came out. Grandma was a member of the Browning Society, a group of ladies in Oxford who read novels and had luncheons to talk about them. *The Reivers* was her choice.

Faulkner's position as my favorite author has been threatened twice, first by James and then by Proust, but I realized later that what the three of them have in common, among that group of what used to be called the modern novelists, is that they are endlessly rereadable. I'm not a fast reader, so I have to be careful. One can't always be reading books: there

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has to be time for the stuff that's being written about, more time for it as one grows older. There are few books that I've read more than twice, very few. Most of them I first read when I was a boy: *Pride and Prejudice, Huckleberry Finn, The Catcher in the Rye*—the usual. Even a second reading is allowed only for the truly great, for one is ever mindful of the vast stands of virgin timber farther off in the forest. I'm certain that there's an essay by Samuel Johnson lurking in my barely dipped-into edition of his works, or one of those forbidding verse plays by Shelley, which, if I read it, would save my soul.

I interviewed the American composer John Corigliano for a newspaper article eight years ago, and he said something I'll never forget (anyway, I still remember it): he told me that he liked the music of Vivaldi, but that after he heard any piece by Vivaldi once, he knew everything it had to say. I don't think Corigliano was being wicked. I had the sense that he really did like Vivaldi's music, but he just didn't want to sit through it again. I have that feeling about most books, even very good books: Nice to meet you. Excuse me, I must be going.

Until a few years ago, every summer I would drag down one of the great Faulkners and reread it; but it was always one of the great ones. I will venture to assert that of all the blue-chip names of modern literature, none is more uneven than Faulkner. I won't say that *Pylon* is a bad novel, quite, but once really was enough; for me, Douglas Sirk's film version, *The Tarnished Angels,* is a better performance. I can't imagine being so hard up for something to read that I would want to do *Mosquitoes* again. Yet I believe that in his unevenness lies the key to why Faulkner rereads so well: the books are all so different. Although there is nothing in literature more instantly recognizable than a Faulkner sentence, always threatening to spiral out of control but never quite doing so, with modifiers piling up like a wet spring blizzard, nonetheless the five or six or seven really great books that he wrote are completely different in form and content. It's as though every time he sat down to tell a story, he reinvented the novel. That was finally the reason, even more than the obvious one, that Faulkner became my favorite author: it was like getting half a dozen for the price of one.

There's something inescapably adolescent about the concept of a favorite author, I admit. I remember once being at a dinner table in London, listening to an eminent music critic and a highly successful record producer get into a heated argument about who was greater, Mozart or Mahler. It occurred to me at the time that despite the frequent occurrence of Italian and German words, the discussion was in no essential way different from high school lunchroom debates about the relative merits of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. Most (I won't say all) bookish people, like musical people, have an adolescent streak: it was in our teen years that we got to be that way, and for many of us, the discovery of the

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writer who would become our favorite was a moment of revelation. There's no such thing as a desert island, and you can have a different flavor of ice cream every day of the month, if you wish. But people who love books can't help having favorites—and prejudices.

To return to my musical analogy: a few days after that Mozart versus Mahler fracas, my Mozartian friend, the record producer, confided to me that he might actually like Mahler, if it weren't for the Mahlerians. That's the way I feel about Joyce and the Joyceans. No writer is as good as they say he is. Thornton Wilder was supposed to have read *Finnegans Wake* some ungodly umpteen dozen times: just think of all the good books he didn't have time to read because he was too busy tracking down more tedious references to forgotten Icelandic eddas and the pubs of Dublin, adding them to the catalogue like an indefatigable beetle collector. That's fanaticism, not favoritism. The Hemingway people are just as bad, with their unquenchable lust for life and all that. If anything, I have a higher regard for Agatha Christie fans—you know they're not out to impress anyone or prove anything, they just love to read. Writers create worlds: Where do you want to go, from time to time, for the rest of your life? Madame Verdurin's salon? Janeland? You can tell a lot about a person by who his favorite author is. I have a friend whose favorite author is Ivy Compton Burnett. That's all you know about him, but you won't be surprised to know that he's a kind man, of temperate habits, who wears hats.

A favorite author is like a religion: technically, you're not required to do much except profess it. Until I started thinking about this essay, I had let five or six Faulknerless years pass by. I won't say I missed him—I discovered some wonderful writers during that time—but neither would I say that his supremacy in my reading was ever in any danger, except for the brief James and Proust scares I mentioned before. For me, he has become like the Queen Mother in Great Britain: at this point he doesn't have to do anything to keep my loyalty. However, I thought that to grease up the machinery, I would read my first Faulkner, my favorite Faulkner, and *Sartoris,* the only one of the novels I hadn't read. I've already dealt with *The Unvanquished.* It was a pleasure to revisit. No one ever talks about it now, yet I commend it to you: it's one of the complaisant little Faulkners, and it reads like a house on fire.

Then I turned to *Sartoris.* What a dreadful book. I've had a copy that I bought at a tag sale twenty-odd years ago, but, as I said, I never got around to it. It's another Signet paperback, from the fifties, the pages of which are now tawny and brittle. On the cover there is a hideous painting of Narcissa Benbow, her nightgown slipping off her shoulder, clinging to a haggard-looking Bayard Sartoris (grandson of the Bayard Sartoris in *The Unvanquished,* who appears in *Sartoris* as an old man), his eyes grimly fixed on something in the distance—which is pretty much all that happens in the novel, apart from some lame comic relief about old Bayard's

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wen and the servants' shenanigans, which are really just darky humor. It took me weeks to read *Sartoris:* I never knew there were so many household chores that needed attending to.

Next was my favorite Faulkner, which isn't as easy as it sounds. For most members of the church, it comes down to a choice between being an Absalom, Absalom!ite or a Sound-and-Furian, with a highly respectable schism adhering to *Light in August.* (And we all have a sentimental soft spot for *As I Lay Dying* and admit that *A Fable* is a ponderous bore.) I always used to say that *Absalom, Absalom!* was my favorite Faulkner novel. It is certainly the one in which style most spectacularly becomes the subject. There's never been a novel with better sentences. But as a story, and finally Faulkner really is a storyteller, *The Sound and the Fury* is the novel one can't forget. For the selling of the Compson mile to send that poor twisted boy to Harvard, where he would pant in the cold air, the iron New England dark, that he didn't hate the South (that was in *Absalom, Absalom!,* of course) before drowning himself. For his namesake shrieking at her uncle Jason, "If I'm bad, it's because I had to be. You made me. I wish I was dead. I wish we were all dead." For Dilsey, dressed for church, bringing in the firewood, and for Luster, repairing the idiot Ben's broken narcissus with a splint. And was there ever a better title?

I realized when I reread *The Sound and the Fury* this last time that the Compsons live on South Lamar Boulevard. It's right there, in the final pages of the novel. Dilsey asks Luster if he knows the way to the cemetery: "Up de street, round de square, to de graveyard, den straight back home." The street she refers to, which leads directly to the square's south side, where the Confederate memorial stands, is South Lamar. As you might expect, I have always in my mind's eye used my grandparents' house on South Lamar Boulevard as the Compson place; and, in fact, it could have been.

I don't claim that my childhood experiences in Oxford give me any special status as a Faulkner critic, something I am not, but I do claim special privileges as a Faulkner reader. However, there's a price of a sort to be paid: sometimes I have trouble keeping it straight as to what is imitating what. I won't get carried away with an amateur analysis of the science of memory, but, after all, "life," aside from the observable moment of the present, is only something we remember. And all memory is fallible, particularly memories of childhood. It's a phenomenon commonly remarked: the big house one remembers visiting as a child is so small when revisited in adulthood. A great-aunt with a few odd habits who once went on a holiday to Egypt is a flamboyant world traveler, a veritable Mame—until she is remet twenty years later, a nice lady who watches Oprah, with a bronze sphinx on top of the TV set.

Yet my childhood experiences have been transformed not only by the

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usual processes of memory and maturity but also by literature. It's not as though my favorite author were someone who wrote a factual history of Oxford, Mississippi; rather, he was the master of mood, one of the most effective evokers of atmosphere who ever plied an Underwood. Thus, as I look back on my life, even the most common memories, the standard-issue stuff of childhood, partake of mythology. It's hard for me to separate the loquacious little old ladies I met in Oxford, my grandmother's friends, from the loquacious little old ladies in the novels: How could my memories of Miss Maud Falkner not be shaped by the unforgettable description of Miss Rosa Coldfield in the opening pages of *Absalom, Absalom!*? Now, whenever I smell the fragrance of wistaria in bloom, it powerfully takes me back to those Oxford summers, but I can't distinguish between the wistaria that grew on the white, fan-shaped trellis in my grandfather's garden and the one that wafts its perfume so pungently through Miss Rosa Coldfield's office, "the dim coffin-smelling gloom sweet and over-sweet with twice-bloomed wistaria against the outer wall." The increasingly unreal world of my childhood has merged with eternal, changeless Yoknapatawpha.

Borges, in his essay about Kafka, said that every writer creates his own precursors. In much the same way, every reader creates his own writer. A reader's writer is a shadowy, sketchy place, which satisfies the requirements of the text and possesses just enough substance to permit it to be enacted. In my Austen, the Bennets' parlor is different from the one in your Austen. We both imagine a parlor we have seen, a period room in a museum or an illustration in a childhood copy of *Pride and Prejudice,* perhaps the set in the movie with Greer Garson and Laurence Olivier, then we redesign it as needed: if the text calls for a marble fireplace, a marble fireplace appears. Likewise, in my Twain, Huck Finn looks different from the way he does in yours, though they will be similar, since both Hucks must adhere to the descriptions in the books. I might cast the boy who sat next to me in geometry class in high school, who had freckles and a cowlick; you might choose a rawboned kid who bags groceries at the supermarket. Yet it really doesn't matter whose face we put on Huck; it's just an imaginative convenience. Huck Finn exists only in the words of Twain's books.

I hope I don't seem to gloat: it was just a stroke of good fortune, nothing of my own doing. If my grandfather's hardware store had been in Batesville or Holly Springs, I wouldn't be writing this. But it was in Oxford, a small town where everybody knows everybody else, and my childhood playmates were William Faulkner's cousins. I didn't have to create my Faulkner: it was given to me, perfect and whole.

The last time I was in Oxford was a little over twenty years ago. Everyone there was excited about the town's first shopping mall and wanted to take me there to show it off. Of course, in Houston I had grown up with

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palatial shopping malls, but I went to see Oxford's new mall and admired it with all the enthusiasm I could muster. Yet I knew that it was built on the ruins of the icehouse, the blacksmith's shop, and the three-digit telephone number—not to mention the separate water fountains at the courthouse and the balcony of the Lyric theater. Understandably, Oxonians had no interest in remaining quaint and old-timey, and black Oxonians took an active interest in not being discriminated against.

In the last pages of *The Sound and the Fury,* you may recall, when Luster drives up to the square and reaches the Confederate monument, he turns the surrey to the left instead of the customary right. Ben Compson stands up, bellowing with shock and horror. Then his brother Jason comes jumping across the square, takes the reins from Luster, and turns the surrey to the right and drives on around the square. "The broken flower drooped over Ben's fist and his eyes were empty and blue and serene again as cornice and façade flowed smoothly once more from left to right; post and tree, window and doorway, and signboard, each in its ordered place."

Past the façade of Nielson's department store, where my mother took me to buy blue jeans; past the doorway of the University Men's Shop, owned by Faulkner's friend Howard Duvall, who turned up so often for dinner at my grandparents' house after his wife died; past the cornice of the drugstore painted in tall letters with the name of its original proprietor, T. E. Avent, whose grandson Tommy took me swimming at the country club; past the windows of Park's barbershop; past the signboard of Uncle Phil's office; past the Lyric theater, the Gathright-Reed pharmacy, and Blaylock's drugstore, where I bought my first Faulkner and wrote my name in it, then back down South Lamar Boulevard—home.

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Lines Beginning with an Anacreontic Fragment

for Eleanor Mattern

KATE BARNES

For she seems to hear
if one only wishes to speak, sang
an ancient Greek, a young man,
garlanded at the symposion, saluting
the dancer at whose feet he had just tossed
a coin for luck; and I,
divided by twenty-five hundred years
from his brown, prow-like face, the fennel leaves
drooping across his brow, the dark-red wine
splashing in his cup as he gestured
grandly, freely—I looked
over his shoulder, waiting for the wine
to be drunk, for the painting
at the bottom of the cup to show
itself; the god
sailing through commingled sea and sky,
alone, with seven dolphins
leaping around him, his forehead
crowned by upright leaves, his body wrapped
in a mantle of stars, his mast entwined
by two tall, interlacing vines.
But why
do seven clusters of black grapes hang down
so heavily over his sacred head
like portents from dancing Fate, like promises
of what will be torn, what
will be crushed, what will seem
to perish awhile, what will flow out,
what will work in darkness, what will come to life
once more in the hand on the strings, in the music
rising strong in the young man's mouth?

Kate Barnes, Maine's first poet laureate, is the author of *Where the Deer Were.*

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Mayan Mathematics

The Dark Side of Zero

ROBERT KAPLAN

The Mayan symbol for zero was a tattooed man in a necklace with his head thrown back. Or at least this was one of the Maya's astonishing array of zero symbols. Since their culture flourished from about 300 B.C. to 900 A.D. in the Yucatan Peninsula, isolated from any overseas contacts, they provide vivid testimony to an independent origin for the concept of zero and its signs. And why not? Why should this idea not have sprung up in such different cultures as those of Babylonia, India, and the Yucatan—preserved and passed on here, flaring up and dying out there in the minds of many a mute, inglorious Newton? Since mathematics is our universal language, obscured by overlays of the accidental languages colonizing the time and place we were born to, why should it not break through with glory, the expression of its constructions altered by those accidents, but the relations so expressed reaching beyond our mortal natures? If we had to give the pedigree of zero as we do that of a horse, we could say: by Imagination, out of Necessity.

Although our image of the Maya is one part fact and three parts conjecture (and these tempered by the fashions ascendant at their making), it is hard not to believe that they counted as if their lives depended on it; and what they counted was time. Transposed to our calendar, their starting date for the universe would be August 13, 3114 B.C. This was their zero day. You wonder how they arrived at it; and since your wonder is

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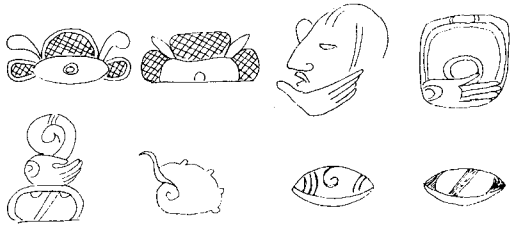
unlikely ever to be satisfied, it might turn instead, briefly, to James Ussher, Archbishop of Armagh, who in the mid-1600s discovered that the world had been created on October 22, 4004 B.C., at six o'clock in the evening. What a feat! For if you can think at all of the universe beginning, you have to be able to think both sides of that moment (now you don't see it, now you do), a task evidently within Ussher's competence. I like to picture him at his candlelit desk, the shadows of Latin and Hebrew and Greek folios falling about him; bent in perplexity over his calculations; reckoning a final sum; looking up at the flame as revelation dawns—of course! October 22! And at 6 P.M.!

The Maya scrupulously recorded the dates of important events in terms of their zero day, in what archaeologists have come to call the Long Count. Instead of numbering days consecutively from the beginning—a poor use of the brain so avid for patterns—they divided time into years of eighteen months *(uinal),* with twenty days *(kin)* in each. That made a 360-day year called a *tun,* and these tun they then grouped by twenties *(katun),* so that one katun had 20 x 360 = 7200 days. Twenty katun in turn made a *baktun,* or 400 tun (144,000 days); and they had units larger than these, up to an *alautun* of 64,000,000 years.

There were distinct glyphs for each of these groupings. In order to show on a monument that the day of its erection was, for example, precisely 1,101,611 days since time began, they would write: 7 baktun 13 katun 0 tun 0 uinal 11 kin (7 x 400 + 13 x 20 = 3060 years, each with 360 days = 1,101,600 days; and 11 days more makes 1,101,611 days). The 7, 13, and 11, like all of their numbers, were made up of bars for fives and dots for ones (so 7 was ⁚ , 13 was ⁝⁝⁝, and 11 was ⁝⁝⁝); but the glyphs for zero—crucial in keeping track of missing middle groupings (for instance, 107 as opposed to 17)—were sometimes faces, sometimes full figures, sometimes like half flowers; and in manuscripts, at times like snail shells and at times like nothing we can name.

If there were none of the last units, days, the Maya carefully noted this too with a zero glyph: which tells you that something was going on more

At times, like nothing we can name: an abstracted, necklaced tattooed man, and other Mayan symbols for zero. Drawings by Ellen Kaplan for The Nothing That Is: A Natural History of Zero.



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significant to them than getting the date right—something with a formal, ritualistic cast. Keep this in mind as we try to puzzle out the picture of their world. It has undoubtedly struck you that 360 may be mathematically convenient for the length of a year, but that it won't keep up with the recalcitrant nature of things. The sidereal year is roughly 365.242198 days long, so that in less than a katun you would be a hundred kin out in your reckoning of day length, seasons, and anniversaries. Perhaps this was why the Maya had another calendar that ran alongside the Long Count: a "civil" year (the *Haab*), also of eighteen twenty-day months, but with five "phantom" days tucked in at the end, so that it was only about a quarter day short of the solar year (and hence people versed in such matters now slightingly call the Haab the "vague year").

Important as zero was in anchoring the Long Count, it took on a new and peculiar significance with the Haab. The first day of each twenty-day month wasn't numbered 1, but 0; the second 1, and so on, with the twentieth day numbered 19 (the five-day month at year's end followed suit). I don't know of another calendar in which the days of the month begin with zero. We rarely even count years in this retrospective way: only the sinister example of Pol Pot comes to mind, since he called 1975 the Year Zero of his reign—the year in which he would purify his enemies into nothingness.

Such numbering always suggests a beginning that is no beginning: a false dawn or overture (so Christopher Robin was all of one when he had just begun). It is the sort of counting that lies behind a particularly clever trick of modern magic. Members of the audience each write secret sentences on slips of paper, seal them, and toss them into a hat. Blindfolded, the clairvoyant gropes for one at random, with effort intuits its content, and announces it. "Yes!" says someone in the audience, "that's just what I wrote!" The mind reader takes off his blindfold, unseals the slip and reads off the message: it is exactly as he had said. Blindfolded again, he chooses a second message, holds it unopened, yet somehow, with his third eye, perhaps, is able to make out its words and declaim them.

Another audience member, flabbergasted, acknowledges it. On looking, the mind reader confirms his vision. And so it goes on, through one slip after another, until all know that they are in the presence of the supernatural. Or are they? It is zero whose power they have felt. The first message the mind reader deciphered was one that he and his accomplice in the audience had earlier agreed on. That was the zero message. When he took off his blindfold, what he read on the slip he had randomly drawn was the message he would "intuit" next—and so craftily on, declaring the previous message's content as he read out the one that now sat in its stead.

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In the Haab calendar, it was on the zero day that the god of the previous month put down his burden of time, and the god of the present month was seated in order to take it up. For us this occurs in an instant, as when old Janus, keeper of doorways, gives over his weeks to Februus of the purifications. For the Maya this transfer must have been more anxious, as Zip acceded to Zotz or Zotz to Zec. The god who oversaw these events was Zero. A full day for the handing over! I wonder what people did as it dragged by? We know that during the five phantom, or "useless," days at the end of the year, Mayan men and women neither washed nor combed themselves, nor undertook any work, lest it miscarry.

Now, since the Long Count sufficed to pin down any date precisely and the Haab reconciled the cycle of months to the solar year, what need had the Maya of still another calendar? And yet they had one, and it was very important to them: a sacred year, the *Tzolkin,* of 260 days. Its strange construction tells you a great deal about the Mayan obsession with counting; the concurrence of three calendars points to the source of this obsession—in dread.

With this third calendar we can't speak of months so much as of two cycles: one of twenty day names *(Imix, Ik, Akbal . . .)* and one of the numbers 1 through 13. You will appreciate why the Maya held their mathematicians in such high esteem when you learn that the numbers matched the first thirteen names, then began again with the fourteenth: so that the day names 14 through 20 *(Ix* through *Ahau)* went hand in hand with the numbers 1 through 7. Then came the first day name, Imix, around once more, matched now with number 8, and so through the sixth day name *(Cimi)* tied to 13. *Manik,* the seventh day, was now paired with the number 1—and this staggering offbeat rhythm went on until 13 x 20 = 260 days after it started, when Imix stood for the first time again with the number 1 and a fresh sacred year commenced. Any combination of number and name would tell you precisely which day of this year it stood for—if you had the knack of it through insight or arduous training.

Why such a bizarre calendar? Perhaps because for the Maya there were thirteen gods of the upper world, while twenty was the number of man (not an uncommon assignment, given ten fingers and ten toes). This interlacing of the two cycles may therefore have been meant to harmonize the secular and the divine. There were also nine gods of the underworld in the Mayan pantheon; they had skeletal lower jaws and were ruled by the Death God. So is it any wonder that the Maya had a fourth calendar too, a cycle of nine glyphs representing the Lords of the Night, who ruled each day in turn? And a lunar calendar of 29- and 30-day months; and a sixth calendar, based on the 584-day synodic cycle of Venus (its apparent oscillation from one side of the sun to the other)?

Although theirs is the only culture to have institutionalized such a

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complex obsession with counting, surely each of us has succumbed at one time or another to its compulsive insistence, telling off the seconds, the cracks in the sidewalk, the patternless holes in the dentist's ceiling tiles; and always what begins in jest ends in earnest, needing no little effort to turn off the machine as we begin to count its counting, to doubt it and double back, to lose our way and wish it done with, in vain, until we recognize that servant and master have changed places and we are no more than the housing for a relentless automaton.

Some have reached an accommodation with their monster: Sir Francis Galton, cousin of Darwin and the father of eugenics, counted everything in sight and even had gloves made up for him with pistons that drove ten separate counters, so that he could unobtrusively keep track of the percentage of beautiful women in Macedonian villages while tallying up the average price of goods in their shop windows. Others have just given themselves up, like the otherwise lumpish farmhand Jedediah Buxton, who in the eighteenth century couldn't help calculating how many hairbreadths wide was every object in his path; and who, when treated to a trip to London to see the great Garrick in a play, announced at its end precisely how many words each actor had spoken, and how many dance steps each had taken. We hear tales linking autism's estrangement to a preternatural fascination with, and skill at, counting; we remember Freud, in his old age, insisting that rhythmic repetition was the expression of our longing, even beyond pleasure, for sameness, and sameness was the emissary of death.

We can't, however, dismiss the Maya as suffering from some sort of collective arithmomania, since it wasn't so much the counts as their coincidings that mattered to them. And here once again we have to admire their mathematical skills. If the 365-day Haab and the 260-day Tzolkin began together, when would the first day of each next be the same? Put the problem with more manageable numbers to see how to solve it: when will a two-day and a five-day cycle coincide? Clearly, after $2 \times 5 = 10$ days: 10 is their least common multiple. And four- and six-day cycles? $4 \times 6 = 24$ is their product, yet 24 isn't the answer: they will first coincide after 12 days, because you have to divide the product by 2, since 2 is the greatest common divisor of 4 and 6. The Maya understood that since 5 was the greatest common divisor of 260 and 365, the Haab and the Tzolkin would begin again together after $\frac{260 \times 365}{5} = 18{,}980$ days, which was 52 Haab or 73 Tzolkin years. This period is called the Calendar Round, and it seems that each completion brought unmitigated cruelties. Why? Let me add a light patina of unifying conjecture to the scatter of those that shape our sense of Mayan thought.

The great fear was that time might stop; for since it carried all its sons away to the pulse of the Long Count, why should the Mayan empire, the

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earth, the sky with its countless stars, and the universe itself, not perish as well? To prevent this the Maya took drastic measures, both clever and horrible. First, they transferred the cyclicity they saw in the heavens to linear time, which therefore couldn't stop in the middle of a cycle—but might yet at its end. Very well, set in motion another cycle out of phase with the first: now time couldn't stop until those rare occasions when the ends of both cycles coincided—and at such evil moments (as every 52 civil years), the Maya offered up to the gods the essence of vitality—blood, virgins, hearts cut from living victims—that the gods might revive themselves with these sacrifices, and so be willing to pick up again the burden of months put wearily down on zero days.

The trouble with obsessions is that once one is in their grip, nothing is ever enough. More cycles, more cycles, to put off the danger to yet greater multiples! Five synodic years of Venus made eight years of the Haab; 405 lunations were 46 Tzolkin years; the Mayan codex now preserved at Dresden lists multiples of 78, and the synodic year of Mars is 780 days; one archaeologist even suggests that since 9 was the number of gods of the underworld and 13 of the upper, and since 9 x 13 = 117, the Maya must also have calculated the synodic year of Mercury, which is 116 days. (Keep in mind how vivid and portentous the night sky must have been to people from whom it wasn't hidden by city lights.) On the other hand, there were the divisions of cycles to worry about: every five years (the quarter-points of a katun), their king spectacularly mutilated himself that his blood might keep the thirsty gods at their task. As a pair of scholars put it, blood was the mortar of ancient Maya life.

Nothing is ever enough. Their Long Count held out the promise that time wouldn't stop for an immense span indeed. A system of dating we find on some of their monuments acted like the service coupons that come with your new car: if there is a voucher for a 50,000-mile checkup, you feel confident that your car will just be coming to maturity then. If there is none at 150,000 miles, a shiver runs through you. The Maya's dating system seemed to show that they had hardly moved forward from time's beginning in a stretch ahead (by one reckoning) of about 2×10^{27} years. By comparison, our own culture's Big Bang was a puny 12 or so billion years ago (1.2×10^{10}). But like some postmodernist novel of drawers within drawers of a tumbledown desk, even the Long Count itself became thought of as no longer linear, but as the latest period of these immensely long spans, which had reached cyclically back and would reach cyclically forward forever. It was as if the Maya had taken out insurance policies on their insurance policies.

A wonderful advantage lay in rethinking the Long Count as itself periodic. Not only would the threat of time's cessation diminish, but now the birth of a great ruler could be proved (if your mathematicians were agile enough) to have fallen precisely a significant number of years after,

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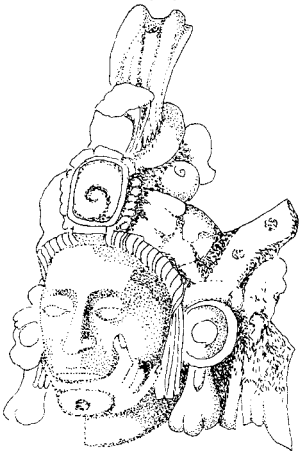
say, the birth of a mythical ancestress—the significance being that the time span was an integral multiple of several cycles: the Haab and the Tzolkin, the synodic period perhaps of Mars and of Mercury to boot. Such good fortune in catching the crest of the polyrhythms was apparently taken to show that the birth was a rebirth: the human Pacal, greatest of all of Palenque's rulers, *was* his divine ancestress.

Once you let the analogy "A is like B" turn into "A *is* B," imagination hardens into the excesses of fantastic conviction, and the catch on the box that stores the demonic snaps open, letting Hell loose. I mentioned that the gods of the underworld, the nine Lords of the Night, were ruled by the Death God—but I didn't tell you who this death god was: he was Zero. His was the day of the Haab when time might stop. His was the end of each lesser and greater cycle: fearful pause. Now if a human were found who could take on Zero's persona—and if *he* could be put to ritualistic death—then Death would die!

And that, it seems, is just what the Maya were up to. They had a ritual ball game between a player dressed as one of their hero twins and another dressed as the God of Zero. The ball was an important hostage, such as a defeated king, who had been sequestered for many years and was now trussed up for the occasion. The two players skillfully passed and kicked and beat him to death, or killed him in the end by rolling him down a long flight of stairs; and it was the hero twin who always won by outwitting Zero. In other such games, the loser was sacrificed. But outwitting death wasn't enough. A human would be dressed in the regalia of the God of Zero, and then sacrificed by having his lower jaw torn off. As with most religions, the failure of ritual to achieve its aim didn't alter it, since even the barbarous live in hope. Anthropologists of another generation, following Ruth Benedict, would have called the high culture of the Maya Dionysian—but that, I feel, is a slur on Dionysus. This blood-soaked society, with its glyphic wit—so clever at numbers, so artful in building, so apt at astronomy—reminds me of a brilliant and very neurotic friend I had who appeared one day without his tics and twitches. What had happened?



The God of Zero.
Illustration by Ellen Kaplan.

"I traded all my neuroses in," he explained, "for one little psychosis, and now my life makes sense."

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BRIAN SWANN

Wind

through bluestone walls steadied
by skims & chinks, the wind,
divider & joiner, bringing in what
was far away, clarifying & confusing,
wind, the first idea, impulse
informing all flesh & non-flesh
that makes it leap out of background
decay & stasis, spirit, inspiration, breath,
so once here it seems to come
from inside & call the outside,
calling it back, & the outside
replies, calling it in.

Brian Swann's most recent book is *Wearing the Morning Star.*

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Contemporary Memoirs

Or, Who Cares Who Did What to Whom?

CAROLYN G. HEILBRUN

As a culture, we are given these days to remembering. We write and publish memoirs, as we call the current form of autobiography, and as the memoirs proliferate, so do the complaints. Disaffected readers have pointed out that from its inception, autobiography followed public achievement: its declared aim was to explain how an outstanding famous individual came to accomplish what he did. And the writer was invariably a he.

Autobiographies have been renamed memoirs, perhaps, because they can be seen to serve a new purpose: to reveal certain circumstances throughout a life that testify to the unusual claims the writer has made upon the world. And the writers of *these* memoirs are frequently, if not exclusively, women. Men who write memoirs these days usually wish to encompass the destiny of a particular nation, or race, or quality that has led to oppression: they are, for example, Irish, or Jewish, or black, or gay. Men prominent in the intellectual or literary world largely eschew the memoir form for reasons arising from both past and present. The autobiographies and autobiographical novels of an earlier generation had colonized and exhausted the form; in the present, it appears that men find that the genre has become feminized, sounding plaintive and excessively personal, and therefore threatening.

Women have only recently begun in large numbers to recount their lives, reminding us of the end of the *Odyssey,* when Odysseus and

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Penelope have recognized and greeted each other. They retire to bed to tell each other their adventures. In a manner notoriously unmale, Odysseus lets Penelope tell her story first. This is so uncharacteristic of men that Samuel Butler regarded it as adequate proof that the author of the *Odyssey* was a woman. But there was, of course, another reason. We listeners and readers had heard Odysseus's story through many nights and days; we could hardly be expected, even in so oral a culture as Homer's, immediately to hear it again. Penelope's story was less fully recounted; indeed, apart from her isolation and her unfailing devotion to her husband, it was hardly known. Hers is the only untold story left to be heard by Odysseus or the tale's listeners.

So it is today. And those men not in bed with Penelope are growing weary of the many renditions of female lives. Not a few desperate male critics may have wished to evoke James Baldwin's lines: "The story of my childhood is the usual bleak fantasy, and we can dismiss it with the unrestrained observation that I certainly would not consider living it again." If only, men plead, if only women were as eager as Baldwin to dismiss the "usual bleak fantasy." Jonathan Yardley, not noted for welcoming women's writing, complained in the *Washington Post* about Susan Cheever's account of her alcoholism and its roots in the behavior of her drinking father. He sneered at her as a "professional daughter, alcoholic variety . . . adding another chapter to her endless exploration and glorification of a life that long ago lost any claim on the attentions of others." For "others," read aging, irritable, male reviewers.

Such, too, is the message of Patrick Smith, writing in the *Nation.* He tells us with unconcealed disdain the degree to which he is fed up with the sort of detail that Geraldine Brooks, for example, provides in her memoir *Foreign Correspondence,* in which she tells us that her father pressed "odd bits of soap into new bars."

Smith wonders what this fact, so typical of the female memoir, has to do with a wider context, like those evoked by the men whose life stories he admires. He is all but outright in admitting that he dislikes women's memoirs, and he seems incapable of imagining why women insist on writing them. "The new memoir," he declares, is not "to be taken on its own terms. The only encouraging thing about the phenomenon, it seems to me, is the number of people who suspect it." Can it be only because, for some incomprehensible reason, such memoirs sell? No, says Smith: "The memoir trend is not just a publishing ruse to get more people to buy more books. It's an intellectual fraud."

Mean-spirited and male-oriented though his tirade was, I do not find Smith's impatience beyond understanding. In 1988, I published a book titled *Writing a Woman's Life,* in which I discussed the need for women to tell their stories. I still acknowledge the necessity, which Smith is unable or unwilling to do, but pushed against a wall with a gun to my head, I

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would have to admit that I wish the flood would abate. Women, so long silenced, now seemingly speak in chorus; but what else is to be expected?

I understand and acclaim the need of women to speak out, often of events and decisions that strike Smith and other male readers as utterly without wide significance. Furthermore, had I been inundated with male stories, I probably would have recoiled much sooner. I am altogether familiar with male stories and the forms they take, but female accounts are still quite unfamiliar. That these accounts, these contemporary memoirs, are not comparable to Boswell's life of Johnson or Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes* is hardly the point.

Smith detests the women's memoirs he excoriates, but he refuses to see that entertaining or enlightening him is not the objective of the women writing memoirs today. There is one general purpose behind these female stories: to tell what has not been told before, or has not been told in the public sphere by women to women. Smith may feel "awash in published memoirs of the most emotional and personal kind," but how many women have been able to read the modern mistress's tale, as Lillian Ross has now told it in *Here But Not Here,* or the story of father-daughter incest, as related by Kathryn Harrison in *The Kiss?* Men have long known that such situations flourished, but until now no women have described them in personal accounts.

Let me intrude with a small memoir of my own. Smith summons T. S. Eliot to support his judgments, rephrasing Eliot in order to declare that the memoirs he dislikes "do not represent an embrace of public discourse but a flight from it." Smith has exactly missed the point: public discourse has long needed to include the unrecorded truth of women's lives. Women today do not flee public discourse; they attempt to redefine it. My college and graduate school years were imbued with T. S. Eliot, New Criticism, and the flight from the personal. Eliot was the prophet of this philosophy—not surprisingly, when we now consider the personal devils from which he fled throughout his life. Of these, women were the chief. One need only note the misogyny of his works, like "The Waste-land," in which none but evil women speak and the woman he loves is silent, holding a bunch of wet hyacinths. In my lifetime, Eliot as a prose moralist has not prevailed, though he endures as a poet (and as the protected idol of a widow tyrannical about his privacy). Today one quotes his essays only from the sort of desperation felt by Patrick Smith.

One female memoir that Smith does admire is Elizabeth Spencer's *Landscapes of the Heart.* It may be worth trying to understand what it is in this excellent autobiographical account that both appeals to Smith and eliminates it as a *woman's* memoir. What is it that Smith values in this treatment of the public domain, and what, for a woman trying to plumb the long-hidden mysteries of female life, is missing? Why is Smith, who

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wants memoirs that speak to him, pleased? And why are women, who want illumination on all that the centuries of male domination have hidden, left wondering?

There is no question about Spencer's quality as a writer. She is a long-practiced, highly regarded, and skillful novelist. In her memoir she sets down, as the jacket informs us, "not only her own story but that of a place and time that has since disappeared." That place and time is the South of pre-civil-rights years; her own story is that of a woman, rejected by her family, who suffers depression and anorexia. While the "place and time" are evoked in enormous, telling detail—the author announces that she has "come to see that my memories have more in common with country life as described by Chekhov, Tolstoy, and Turgenev than with the America at the time"—her personal story is barely related, inserted only where some explanation of her movements is required. A woman reader may recognize the South of Spencer's youth, and be left wondering what, as a woman, Spencer suffered and overcame, and why, and how.

Here is Spencer's account of her life after her uncle's death from a (perhaps suicidal) gun accident:

> I returned to teach, but found that one wound tears open another, and life was becoming a source of despair for me as well [as for my uncle]. I had gone suddenly from light to darkness. I experienced a daily blank feeling I had never known before. My decision was to work and work I did, harder, harder and harder, but nothing seemed to go well, and for some reason related to my despair, I stopped eating. . . . Colors and sounds grew vague and hard to separate. I seemed to expend an enormous amount of energy simply meeting a one-hour class. When walking, I seemed not to touch the ground. I think I was becoming gravely ill without caring to recognize it.
>
> Something had to give. Shortly after receiving the letter from the Guggenheim Foundation, congratulating me on my appointment as a fellow, I became altogether unable to carry on, and bad times had struck in earnest. I had to delay acceptance of the fellowship until the fall, and go through a long spell in hospital.
>
> But at last, in October rather than June, with mind and body stuck together once more but feeling they might still come apart, reduced to ninety-eight pounds and lacking in daily energy, laden with the multiple anxieties and total disapproval of my parents . . .

she went to Italy. Later she adds: "There would have been plenty of reasons other than disagreements over race to get rid of a contrary, opinionated, non-conforming daughter who not only read books but wanted to write them. All these reasons and doubtless others were in my bulging family dossier; no doubt many were valid. Certainly they were operative."

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Were this a memoir Patrick Smith could not praise, Spencer would have told us what was in that family dossier, why she was becoming gravely ill. We learn (to Smith's approval) the public reason—her family was not as horrified as she by the death of Emmett Till. We learn nothing of why she suffered because she was a daughter, a woman, a gifted student and writer.

I must insist that no criticism of Elizabeth Spencer is intended here, nor do I suggest that she should have written a different book. I use her fine memoir here only as an example of what Smith honors, and to suggest that what he honors is not only Spencer's excellence as a writer, but also, perhaps mainly, her refusal to let us know the personal reasons for her breakdowns. She tells us this much: "A native is one not by choice but by birthright. This is especially true of women. Habits of cooking, of home decor, of manners and hospitality, of reckoning up friends and foes, all stem from a way of life that sets in early." To a woman reader looking for guidance out of the same trap, more is asked, more is needed.

A few decades ago, female confessional poets, as they were called, encountered the same repulsion Smith feels for confessional memoirists. I quote here from the dissertation of Miranda Sherwin, formerly a graduate student of mine: "Confessional poetry is autobiographical, deriving directly from the author's experiences, which tend to be traumatic, instances of mental illness, self-destruction, and the deterioration of family relationships." Sherwin goes on to note how "the innocuousness of the poem stands in stark contrast to the hyperbolity of the criticism."

What is particularly significant here is that the work of Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath was initially dismissed as disgustingly autobiographical; as Christopher Lehmann-Haupt of the *New York Times* wrote, Sexton's "tortured confessions seemed to be personal yelps rather than universal cries." Or as James Dickey put it, "It would be hard to find a writer who dwells more insistently on the pathetic and disgusting aspects of bodily experience." W. D. Snodgrass, Robert Lowell, and John Berryman were also writing confessional poetry—Lowell, indeed, incorporated his wife's letters into his poetry and was defended by so dominant and conservative a critic as Helen Vendler—but they did not suffer such assaults. Their themes were seen as universal truths. To Elizabeth Bishop, who found Sexton "egocentric," Lowell's intimate revelations seemed "painfully applicable to every reader." Not until Miranda Sherwin's dissertation did anyone note that all confessional poets "quite literally broke down under the pressure of trying to live conventional lives." Now that these breakdowns are being reported by women in memoir form, certain male reviewers are as annoyed as Dickey and Lehmann-Haupt ever were.

But is it not true that *Angela's Ashes* is a finer memoir than, let us say,

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Mary Gordon's *The Shadow Man?* Perhaps so; I agree that the former is far more delightful to read. Patrick Smith assures us that the power of Frank McCourt's memoir "lies in its account of an emerging consciousness—a universal experience that is rarely articulated well. It is also about childhood and poverty, survival and laughter, and to an extent the long tragedy of the Irish." And what is *The Shadow Man* about? In the words of Jill Ker Conway, author of the recently published *When Memory Speaks: Reflections on Autobiography,* Gordon's book is about "a competent, middle-aged scholar made so distraught by dealing with her long dead father's past that her shaking hands can't thread film in a microfilm machine." To live in the present, Gordon has to bring to light her fascist, Jewish father, whom she worshiped for everything he was not. McCourt's mother is the long-suffering, passive woman, lovingly revived with Dickensian skill by her now aging son. Gordon's father, dead when she was seven, was an idealized male who turns out to have been all that was most detestable and nothing that he claimed. McCourt's is the oft-told tale of a sweet, sad mother; Gordon's the rarely revealed, detailed account of a father's grip on a daughter's imagination and of his ugly betrayal.

Women's memoirs are significant and compelling to different women in different situations—women who may never before have encountered their particular experience fully disclosed and in detail: suffering, more often than not, is in the details. So for me, as it happens, Gordon's book held little interest, probably as little as it would hold for Patrick Smith. I have never grasped or needed to uncover the hidden life of my forebears, nor do I understand the dominant need to do so that drives many books like Gordon's. These writers seek proof that their fathers—or if they were adopted, their mothers—really loved them, despite much evidence to the contrary; such proof is not, I suggest, discoverable. Yet to seek the love of a dead parent, or to discover his or her unworthiness, is certainly an honorable motive and worthy of a well-written memoir. That it does not enhance my own particular knowledge of life's possibilities and chances for redemption suggests only that there is room for many varied accounts of women's experiences.

A recent memoir by Marilyn French, *A Season in Hell,* recounts the author's battle with esophageal cancer and its cure; but the cure came at the price of impairing almost every other bodily function. Her story, with a mesmerizing and, oddly enough, redemptive power, jolts all women who have undergone, or who fear, cancer's assaults. Men, whose strokes and other debilitating afflictions are often written about, find their sufferings and triumphs better received. But women have until very recently been persuaded to acquiesce in silence to such onslaughts; their afflictions have not been considered the stuff of heroic and "universal" memoirs.

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But then women, their sufferings neglected, have always been held to a different, female standard, have always been judged and praised for qualities that men never needed or wanted to perfect. It was only in 1960 that the theologian Valerie Saiving pointed out that all writings about religious experience arise from the standpoint of "man," and do not apply to "man" generically, but only to males. For if the key to Christian salvation is said to be "selfless love," women hardly need to receive the admonition of selflessness; such an admonition is far more usefully directed at men intent on striving for individual accomplishment. Men do not live, and have never lived, yearning to surrender their individuality and merge into harmonious love. It is women who, practicing selflessness, have striven to obliterate self and to live for others. The Christian ideals of charity and love are necessary for men, but are ignored by them; indeed, men expect women to embody these virtues *for* them, in their stead.

Women were traditionally forbidden to practice male sins; men were excused those sins because of their ordained place in the wide, wicked world. This division was never fair and probably not wise. In any case, women have come to resent the place in which they have so long been confined, and they have begun to question their assignment to a world of limiting virtues, however ideal, however sweet. This resistance has, for decades now, caused anguish among males and the women who identify with them; as "confessional" poetry of the female kind has passed from immediate view, that anguish has now found its place in the autobiographical memoir.

In 1980, when autobiography was beginning to be treated as a worthy academic genre, Professor James Olney edited a volume of essays bringing the critical history of autobiography up to date. Of the sixteen essays in the collection, only three were by women, and only one had women as its subject. That essay, now a major feminist document, was "The Other Voice: Autobiographies of Women Writers" by Mary G. Mason. Mason demonstrated how different the few autobiographies we have by women are from those of men. The major male models of autobiography, Saint Augustine's and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's, in no way influenced women writing about their lives. No man, as Mason demonstrates, could possibly have written those women's autobiographies of earlier times that remain to us. The male models, and the feminine deviations, were altogether dissimilar.

And so it is today. Because many current women's memoirs deal with questions that society has preferred to leave unexamined, some of these memoirs shock us, and, becoming best-sellers, provoke male disgust and impatience. Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* provides an excellent example of how things used to be. She tells of a police raid, a century ago, at a brothel in France. Two girls, twelve and thirteen, were arrested;

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they later testified about the important customers they served. One little girl began to speak, Beauvoir writes, but

> the prosecutor stopped her at once: *You must not befoul the name of a respectable man!* A gentleman decorated by the Legion of Honour is still a respectable man when deflowering a little girl; he has his weaknesses, as who does not? Whereas the little girl who does not have access to the ethical realm of the universal—who is not a magistrate, or a general, or a great Frenchman, nothing but a little girl—. . . is perverse, corrupted, vicious, fit only for the reformatory.

Women are shedding the skin of respectability and the conventions designed for them by men, or by men for themselves. In the process, they begin to write of what they know, and not of what they are allowed to know, or expected to know, or, above all, permitted to tell. They will inevitably annoy many male readers. Women have written pornography for men—Anaïs Nin's work and Pauline Réage's *The Story of O* are two modern examples—but they have seldom or never written what they now feel free to relate for themselves, for other women, and for such men as can bear to listen.

One can only say to Patrick Smith, his confreres and colleagues, hold steady! Prepare yourself for the next female affront. You cannot guess how women shall next outrage you.

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Back to the Pillory?

AMITAI ETZIONI

Should young drug dealers, the first time they are caught peddling, be sent home with their heads shaved and without their pants instead of being jailed? When I cautiously floated this suggestion in a conversation over dinner with some liberal friends, they rolled their eyes and stared at me with dismay. I tried to explain that if the same youngsters are jailed, they are likely to be released as more hardened criminals than they were when they were arrested, that rehabilitation in prisons is practically unknown, and that young inmates are often abused. At that point, one of my friends asked if my next suggestion would be to mark offenders with scarlet letters. The others changed the subject.

A few weeks after this dinner conversation, a tragedy brought the merit of shaming back into public and scholarly discussion. I was a member of a panel of lawyers and academics who were asked by National Public Radio to discuss the rape and murder of a seven-year-old girl in a women's bathroom at a Las Vegas casino. We focused most of our attention not on the child's father, who had left his daughter roaming the casino at 3:30 A.M., or on Jeremy Strohmeyer, who had committed the crimes, but on a friend of the murderer named David Cash. After accompanying Strohmeyer to the bathroom, Cash had neither tried to stop the savaging of Sherrice Iverson nor informed the police afterward.

Among the members of our panel was Congressman Nicholas Lampson. Outraged by Cash's failure to intervene, Lampson had drafted a Good Samaritan bill that would impose severe punishments on those who fail to stop a sexual crime against a child when they could do so at little risk to them-

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selves, or who do not report such offenses to public authorities. UCLA law professor Peter Aranella, another panel member, argued that these punishments were too severe and suggested that a shorter jail sentence would suffice. Elizabeth Semil, a member of the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers, was even more critical, commenting that "punitive legislation, criminal legislation, isn't the proper response." She also wondered "whether making it criminal to fail to act is good public policy. In other words, is it going to assist in solving the problem? And my response to that is: absolutely not."

Most of the panel members were echoing sentiments that had been expressed in the popular press, which had found little to like in the Lampson draft bill. A commentator in the *Bergen Record* wrote, "As much as I'd like to encourage compassion and community, I think it's too late to legislate such morality." A letter to the editor of the *Sacramento Bee* observed, "I realize this is a popular issue, but the consequences of a law of this nature are terrifying. . . . Americans would be required to function as part of the government apparatus. . . . Maybe you know someone who takes cash in their business, but doesn't necessarily tell the IRS. You may go to jail for not turning that person in." I, too, wondered if we should and could be turned into a nation of police informers, a role often despised not merely by their fellow citizens but even by the police themselves. And yet I felt strongly that David Cash had behaved abominably and that others must do better. I hoped that Good Samaritanism might be fostered, but in some less punitive way, one that, if possible, entailed no prison terms.

I suggested shaming. Instead of jailing future Cashes, the law should require that the names of *bad* Samaritans be posted on a Web site and in advertisements (paid for by the offenders) in key newspapers. Such postings would remove any remaining ambiguities about what society expects from people who can help others when there is no serious risk to their own well-being. And those with a weak conscience or a faltering civic sense would be nudged to do the right thing by fearing that their names would be added to the list of bad Samaritans, that their friends and families would chide them, that their neighbors would snicker.

While there are no statistics on the matter, it seems to me that judges, in an attempt to find a middle course between jailing offenders and allowing them to walk off scot-free, have tried shaming far more frequently of late than they did a decade or two ago. People convicted of driving under the influence of alcohol in Fort Bend County, Texas, have been sentenced to place "DUI" bumper stickers on their cars. A child molester in Port St. Lucie, Florida, was ordered by a judge to mark his property with a sign warning away children. The same judge ordered a woman convicted of purchasing drugs in front of her children to run a notice in the local newspaper detailing her offense. A Rhode Island man was ordered to publish the following four-by-six-inch notice, accom-

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panied by his photograph: "I am Stephen Germershausen. I am 29 years old. . . . I was convicted of child molestation. . . . If you are a child molester, get professional help immediately, or you may find your picture and name in the paper." A Tennessee judge sentenced a convicted defendant to confess before a church congregation his crime of abetting the sale of a stolen vehicle. Syracuse puts embarrassing signs in front of buildings owned by slumlords; Des Moines publishes their names in newspapers.

Far from being widely hailed as a more humane and just way of punishing offenders and deterring others, such instances of judicial shaming have raised waves of criticism. Nadine Strossen, president of the American Civil Liberties Union, wrote, "I'm very skeptical when criminologists and sociologists say that the best way to rehabilitate someone is to isolate him and put some sort of scarlet letter on him. We need to integrate criminals back into our community." According to Mark Kappelhoff, legislative counsel at the ACLU, "Gratuitous humiliation of the individual serves no societal purpose at all . . . and there's been no research to suggest it's been effective in reducing crime." Judge Nicholas Politan of the U.S. District Court of New Jersey wrote similarly that

> societies have often used branding or close equivalents thereto as means of making certain persons or groups of persons easily identifiable and thus, easily ostracized or set apart. . . . A clear example of such branding, justified by a social purpose wrongfully deemed acceptable by the populace, was the requirement in Nazi Germany that Jews wear the Star of David on their sleeve so that they might easily be identified. . . . This Court must determine whether Megan's Law and its attendant notification provisions amount to a branding of registrants with a "Mark of Cain" or a "Scarlet Letter," thus rendering them subject to perpetual public animus.

Law professor Erwin Cherminsky observed that "the real measure of how civilized we are is the way we choose to punish people. It's not civilized to tell somebody 'you're going to sit in the stocks and we're going to throw stones at you.'" Carl F. Horowitz, Washington correspondent for *Investor's Business Daily,* has also attacked shaming, a category in which he includes public hangings, beheadings of drug dealers, blacklists, and boycotts.

When I faced similar challenges from the students in a sociology class I teach at George Washington University, I suggested that an examination of shaming suffers if one places the label on all punitive measures of which one disapproves. True or pure shaming involves only *symbolic* acts that communicate censure, ranging from relatively gentle expressions such as according a student a C+ or sending a disruptive kid to stand in the classroom's corner, to more severe measures such as facing the victims of one's assault in close quarters and then apologizing to them in front of the community. Shaming differs sharply from many other modes

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of punishment—public flogging, for instance—in that the latter inflict bodily harm rather than being limited to psychic discomfort. While shaming has some untoward consequences of its own, it is a relatively light punishment, especially if one takes into account that most other penalties shame in addition to inflicting their designated hurt.

I stressed to my class that shaming is morally appropriate or justified only when those being shamed are acting out of free will. When people act in ways that the law or prevailing mores consider inappropriate, but cannot help themselves from doing so (for example, when those with mental illnesses defecate in the streets or scream loudly at 3:00 A.M.), chiding them is highly inappropriate. They are to be helped, removed if need be, but hardly shamed.

When I tried to advance similar arguments during our NPR discussion, Elizabeth Semil would have none of them. She would rely instead on education, celebrating those who act like Good Samaritans rather than punishing those who do not:

> Instead of thinking about ways in which we can shame people, let's think about ways in which we can honor or hold up examples of the many heroes that we read about every week who risk their lives to save others; in other words, teaching by positive example children and adults that, indeed, this kind of behavior is rewarded and respected and admired.

Such suggestions show that one's assessment of shaming is highly colored by one's assumptions about human nature. Ms. Semil belongs to the sanguine camp that believes people can be persuaded to conduct themselves in a virtuous manner by allowing their natural goodness to unfold, a process that can be set in motion by praising them when they do well and responding non-judgmentally when they do not. For those who share this view, shaming is not merely cruel but also unnecessary punishment; indeed, punishment in general is anti-social. Many of those who hold this view of human nature tend also to believe that people are innately virtuous—and that if they misbehave, either the demands imposed on them are unjust or their behavior reflects distorting forces that they neither caused nor can control (for instance, a history of abuse by their own parents).

I stand with those who hold that a world of only positive reinforcements, while commendable in theory, is not within human reach, and that hence a society must—however reluctantly—also employ some forms of punishment. Granted, we should first determine if the social demands are fair and reasonable and to what extent we can rely upon positive inducements in given situations. But at the end of the day, some form of disincentive—sparing, let us hope, and mostly of the gentle kind—cannot be avoided. Or, as Texas State District Judge Ted Poe, a strong proponent of shaming penalties, puts it, "a little shame goes a long way. Some folks say everyone should have high self-esteem, but that's

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not the real world. Sometimes people should feel bad."

An often overlooked feature of shaming, I should add, is that it is deeply democratic. Shaming reflects the community's values and hence cannot be imposed by the authorities against a people. Thus, if being sent to the principal's office is a badge of honor in a boy's peer culture, no shaming will occur in that situation. A yellow star, imposed to mark and shame Jews in Nazi Germany, is now worn as a matter of pride in Israel. Thus, people are protected better from shaming that reflects values that are not shared by their community than from other forms of punishment, punishment that can be imposed by authorities without the specific consent of those who are governed.

Critics are quick to turn the tables on those who seek to use the community to shame offenders by pointing out that communities are waning. Legal scholar Toni M. Massaro argues in the *Michigan Law Review* that shaming will be successful and fair only if five conditions coexist:

> First, the potential offenders must be members of an identifiable group, such as a close-knit religious or ethnic community. Second, the legal sanctions must actually compromise potential offenders' group social standing. That is, the affected group must concur with the legal decisionmaker's estimation of what is, or should be, humiliating to group members. Third, the shaming must be communicated to the group and the group must withdraw from the offender—shun her—physically, emotionally, financially, or otherwise. Fourth, the shamed person must fear withdrawal by the group. Finally, the shamed person must be afforded some means of regaining community esteem, unless the misdeed is so grave that the offender must be permanently exiled or demoted.

But, Massaro adds, the "cultural conditions of effective shaming seem weakly present, at best, in many contemporary American cities." While granting that it is unfair to say that "Americans have no commonly shared instincts about crime or about shame," she believes that "American subculturism, or cultural pluralism, is pronounced enough to make broad conclusions about our moral coherence suspect, and thus to undermine the likely effectiveness of widespread government attempts to shame offenders, absent significant decentralization of criminal law authority and the delivery of formal norm enforcement power to the local subcultures."

Communitarians counter that while communities are clearly much weaker now than they were in, for instance, colonial days, they are not powerless, especially in smaller towns and in what have been called urban villages, where ethnic concentrations within big cities form strong enclaves—San Francisco's Chinatown, for instance, or in Miami's Little Havana. Otherwise shaming would be no punishment at all. Most people are very reluctant—ashamed—to drive around with a glow-in-the-dark DUI

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sticker on their car or to take out an ad apologizing for their offenses. An accountant who had been sentenced to stand in his neighborhood with a sign that said "I embezzled funds" seemed deeply distraught when interviewed, musing that he might have been better off if he had instead accepted a jail sentence. A woman convicted of welfare fraud in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, preferred to be jailed than to wear a sign admitting "I stole food from poor people." This sort of intense response hardly reflects indifference.

In arguing about these matters with liberal criminologists, I picked up a useful distinction between two kinds of shaming, one that isolates and should therefore be avoided, and one that reintegrates offenders into communities and is therefore preferred. These criminologists worry that once a person is shamed, he will be cut off from his community and withdraw into himself or, worse still, into a criminal subculture, and hence will be unlikely to be rehabilitated. Instead, they suggest dealing with crimes in a way that restores people to good standing in their communities. The measures they favor include face-to-face meetings between offenders and victims, "facilitated" by community members; the requirement that offenders make amends (for instance, by rebuilding a fence their car demolished); and closure, a ritual of reconciliation and forgiveness. All of these acts help restore the offender to full membership in the community. The criminologist David Karp adds, "These efforts may be through social services or local economic efforts to change the social conditions of the offender's neighborhood."

Reintegrative shaming may well be the best shaming there is, although the jury is out on whether it can be made to work, especially for offenders, such as gang members, who do not belong to the same community as many of their victims. In effect, any kind of shaming will work only if it is couched in the reference terms of the offenders' community—or if these terms can be changed as shaming occurs.

The history of our country offers some lessons on how shaming works, especially on what happens to a good thing when it is driven too far—much too far. Most important, our past teaches us the significance of the particular context. In colonial America, shaming was very common, not merely one tool of punishment among others but a major one. Indeed, historians report that it worked so well in some colonies—South Carolina, for instance—that no prisons were deemed necessary. (This applied only to white people; slaves were treated far more savagely.)

The purest form of shaming was "admonition." The legal scholar Adam Hirsch describes it as follows:

> Faced with a community member who had committed a serious offense, the magistrates or clergymen would lecture him privately to elicit his repentance and a resolution to reform. The offender would then be brought into open

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> court for formal admonition by the magistrate, a public confession of wrongdoing, and a pronouncement of sentence, wholly or partially suspended to symbolize the community's forgiveness.

"The aim," writes historian Lawrence M. Friedman, "was not just to punish, but to teach a lesson, so that the sinful sheep would want to get back to the flock." Friedman also describes another common shaming measure: requiring the culprit—a thief, for example—to wear for six months

> a "Roman T, not less than four inches long and one inch wide, of a scarlet colour, on the outside of the outermost garment, upon the back, between the shoulders, so that all times to be fully exposed to view, for a badge of his or her crime." A robber had to wear a scarlet R; and a forger, a scarlet F, "at least six inches long and two inches wide."

While I can't vouch for Nathaniel Hawthorne's scarlet A, there are cases on record of an adulteress sentenced to wear the letter B (presumably for "bawd") and an adulterous couple forced to wear the letters AD.

Throughout New England, and on occasion as far south as Virginia, stocks (frameworks that secured the ankles and sometimes the wrists) and pillories (posts that secured the head and hands) were set up in town squares in order to maximize the public nature of the offenders' humiliation. Stocks and pillories were effective shaming devices, but they also imposed an excessively cruel degree of physical discomfort by exposing the criminal to the elements and restricting his movements. And, like shaming insignia, they were often accompanied by corporal punishment. In fact, some pillories were used specifically to restrain offenders while they were lashed.

One reason shaming was so powerful in colonial America is that it took place in communities that were much smaller, more tightly knit, and more moralistic than any here today. Friedman describes them as "little worlds on their own, cut off from each other" in which "small-town life [was] at its most communal—inbred and extremely gossipy." Historian Roger Thompson writes that Massachusetts communities were "well stocked with moral monitors who did not miss much in the goldfish-bowl existence of daily life." For example, single people who moved into some colonies were required to board with someone so that the community could keep an eye on them. In such an environment, six months under the stigma of a scarlet letter or even a single day in the stocks—exposed to the scorn of almost everyone one knew—could easily have been very distressing.

In contrast, many Americans today are members of two or more communities (for instance, at work and in their home neighborhoods) and psychologically can shift much of their ego involvement from a community that unduly chastens them to another. While it was not practical during colonial times for most people to escape from one community to

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another, today the average American moves about once every five years, and in the process chooses to which community he or she is willing to be subjected. Moreover, privacy at home is much greater, and the moral agenda of most communities is almost incomparably briefer.

In short, the colonial era shows us how comparatively few matters we attempt to solve by shaming today and how limited our ability to shame actually is. Two and a half centuries ago, shaming was employed as either the only or a secondary form of punishment for practically all matters of personal conduct (from adultery to murder) and public behavior (from embezzling public funds to neglecting to pay taxes). In contrast, our legal system—despite the recent increase in shaming sentences—chooses the option of public embarrassment rather rarely and, as a rule, only for minor, non-violent offenses.

Amy Gutmann, a liberal philosopher at Princeton University, once quipped that "communitarians seek Salem without witches," a comment that most communitarians took as a scorching criticism. (Communitarians—for whom I occasionally speak—favor relying as much as possible on communities, rather than on the state, to shore up the social order.) As I see it, we communitarians should, shamelessly, plead guilty as charged. We do favor communities in which moral mores are upheld without witch hunts and maintain that in our kind of society this is possible.

Of all the colonial methods of shaming, only admonition placed a strong emphasis on reintegrative justice. Its example should appeal to the progressive criminologists who seek to restore it, although for others it may evoke the image of a Soviet or Chinese trial. (Having witnessed a trial in Shanghai, I was offended most not by the shaming per se but by the kinds of "crimes" people were shamed for, which included conceiving a second child and listening to the BBC.) But because shaming was so often linked with public flogging—the sort of cruel and unusual punishment most of us abhorred when a young American was caned in Singapore in 1994—it is easy to see why its history has left it in ill repute. I believe it would be more productive to think about the ways our more liberal and tolerant society might adapt shaming to our needs than to be swayed by its anachronistic image.

Most important, no social policy should be evaluated in itself; it should be compared with the alternatives. Our criminal justice system jails millions of people, about half of them for non-violent crimes. Offenders are incarcerated for ever longer periods, in harsher conditions, with fewer opportunities for parole. Despite its increasing rigor, the system rehabilitates very few and the recidivism rate is very high. And when a year in jail costs about the same as a year at one of our nation's most expensive colleges, taxpayers bear a heavy burden. Our society is therefore eager to find more effective, more humane, and cheaper modes of deterrence. I have no desire to bring back pillories or other restraining devices, but does it make sense to reject shaming—a strictly symbolic punishment—without giving it a fair try?

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You're an Egg

MICHAEL BÉRUBÉ

When I was eighteen I worked for a while in the garment district of New York, cutting fabric, making deliveries, and occasionally doing some heavy lifting. One of my co-workers was a fiftyish, wiry Latino man with a motormouth and an omnidirectional sense of humor. On dreary, boring workdays he could be an ideal companion. But one day, he took it into his head to chatter to me for five hours or so about how fragile our bodies are. "You're an egg," he kept saying as we worked a loading dock, "an eggshell, m'fren'. Sixty pounds of pressure anywhere on your arm and *snap!*, just like that. You fall from fifteen feet, you break one leg, maybe two. You fall from the sixth floor and it's fifty-fifty you're a dead man. 'Course, if you *jump*, you want to make sure you don't screw up and *live*, eh?" He spent most of the day narrating the details of horrible industrial accidents, punctuating them always with the refrain, "You're an *egg*, a little eggshell, I tell you." After a while, it was like working with the voice of Fear nattering away in your skull, like a tableau out of *Pilgrim's Progress*.

I was young, and I really didn't want to hear any of this: fragility was for other people. As for me, I was a healthy college kid, and when I wasn't working or going to classes, I was playing ice hockey for Columbia University's "club" squad, which played in the local metro league against opponents like the John Jay School of Criminal Justice and Nassau County Community College. I'd seen a variety of hockey injuries, from pulled hamstrings to separated shoulders; they were terrifying, and therefore, in order to play, I didn't think about them. Most folks, of course, are

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in deep denial when it comes to dealing with their status as eggs; fragility is always for other people. But there's a funny thing about denial: when you tell people they're in denial, they tend to deny it.

I stopped playing hockey in 1980, at nineteen, when I contracted mononucleosis. The crack in *my* eggshell, it turned out, had nothing to do with sticks or skates or pucks in the teeth. Sometimes it's not a question of sixty pounds of pressure or a fifth-story fall and all the king's horses and all the king's men; sometimes our infirmities are minute, intangible, inscrutable. Sometimes, as with my son James, it's a developmental disability like Down's syndrome, that affects everything you do; sometimes it's a wrathful deity that smites you but once and then goes back to its business. I remember accompanying a close friend to an appointment with a neurologist some years ago; out of the blue, she had suffered a grand mal seizure, and now her neurologist was telling her that her CAT scans, her EEG readouts, and her MRI results had come back, post-seizure, completely normal. No trace of electrical disturbance whatsoever. My friend found this reassuring—and bewildering. "So we're talking about demonic possession," I said to the neurologist with a straight face. The doctor gave me a querulous look, gauging whether I was serious or just annoying, before replying with some aplomb, "No, we don't scan for spirits."

Like a lot of Americans, I have a complicated relation to my body. I'm torn between a sense of obligation to keep the hardware in good physical shape and a sense that it really doesn't matter, in the cosmic scheme of things, if I get extra cheese on the pizza. There are times I like being embodied (as if I had a choice)—when I'm riding waves or bouncing my kids in a pool or making out with my wife; there are times I'm convinced that my embodiment is precisely what's preventing me from getting any *real* work done.

I have suffered no seizures, no falls from great heights. What's happened to my body has happened slowly and imperceptibly: I have gained weight, like many a man in his thirties. Weirdly, though, I've gained *bulk*. At thirty-seven I weigh about forty pounds more than I did at thirty, but as my stomach has grown, so too have my shoulders and chest. It's as if I've gone through puberty a second time, my pituitary getting around to some of the areas it hadn't covered when I was in my teens. I now have a considerable upper body, though I don't especially want one. I don't know how to move around in this new container, and it messes with my self-image something awful. For most of my life I have been a waif, and now, suddenly, in the middle of the journey, I am a brute.

Even when I played hockey, I did so as a scrawny little forward who either got by on speediness or got stapled to the boards by behemoth defensemen. I could hardly even throw a check, let alone knock someone to the ice, so I worked on my stickhandling and stayed as far as possible

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from the rough stuff. And when I was at my fastest, I wasn't too bad a player at all. Once, twenty-seven years ago, I was a star player on a formidable team, a New York City squad that, in 1972, accomplished the unheard-of feat of beating half a dozen of eastern Canada's best youth hockey teams. Wayne Gretzky's team, from Don Valley, Ontario, was in the upper division of a Canadian tournament to which my team was invited—as one of four American teams playing in the sixteen-team lower division. The other three, knowing their place better than we, lost all of their games. We lost 1-0 in the finals, after beating three well-regarded clubs; I'd scored six of our ten goals in those three games and got myself a line or two in the local papers. But Gretzky in 1972 was already famous throughout Canada; like Bobby Orr before him, he'd drawn the attention of National Hockey League scouts by the time he was eight, and everyone knew he would grow up to be one of the game's most extraordinary players. Don Valley, however, lost to Kitchener in the final game of the upper-division tournament. A month later, my team played an exhibition game against Kitchener, and beat them 3-2 in their home rink, much to the consternation and outrage of the locals. To this day, I can say that I played on the team that beat Gretzky's team—despite the fact that the Kitchener officials tacked an extra five minutes onto the third period in a lame attempt to help the hometown kids even the score against the upstart Americans. But since that glorious week in 1972, it's been all downhill for me, leaving me in that unenviable group of humans whose careers as athletes peaked at the age of ten.

A couple of summers ago, when I was just shy of thirty-six, six-foot-one and 220, I decided it might be a good idea to play hockey again—and maybe lose a few pounds, too. In June the University of Illinois opened a new outdoor roller rink, and there were fliers everywhere announcing the formation of a summer roller hockey league. I happened to own rollerblades; my wife had bought me a pair in 1991 so that I could regain my skating legs without going to the rink, and I'd tooled around the neighborhood from time to time, occasionally looking on wistfully at a pickup hockey game in a parking lot but too shy to join in. I would need padding and a helmet to play in a league; I'd given away all my hockey gear when I left New York in 1984. The university league was officially "non-contact," because when you're checked to the ice, you slide, but when you're checked to the asphalt, you land hard and feel lucky to get away with monstrous scrapes and no broken bones. You're an egg, and you need elbow pads and shin guards at the very least.

My egginess was only one of my problems. In order to make the change from ice to roller hockey, I would have to learn how to stickhandle and pass all over again—this time with a new coefficient of kinetic friction; a ball on asphalt moves nothing like a puck on ice. And even on ice, under the best conditions, crisp passing is so much more difficult

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than it looks: you have to calibrate your own speed, your teammates' speed, the likelihood that they'll keep skating in the direction they're skating now, the likelihood that the other bodies on the rink might intercept the pass, and *then* aim the puck so that it lands softly but quickly on about a ten-inch area of your teammate's stick. Too hard and the pass is uncontrollable, useless; too soft and it'll be deflected or picked off. Deposited on the skates, it'll leave your teammate with his head down, blind and vulnerable; too far ahead, and you might as well have given it away.

In order to play at all, I would have to work out regularly just to maintain the wind necessary to last a full game, especially since between 1980 and 1997 I had developed asthma. And, not least of my worries, I would have to learn to play in hundred-degree heat for an hour at a time. Whether it's for lack of trees or lack of hills, prairie summers can be as earnest and as unpleasant as prairie winters.

In one way, roller hockey combines the physical challenge of ice hockey with the long-term endurance demands of soccer: roller hockey teams sometimes field as few as five or six players—about one-third the staff of an ice hockey team. As a result, each player winds up playing the bulk of the game (three twelve-minute periods in my league), often for seven or eight minutes at a stretch. At my age, there was no way I could play effectively on shifts longer than three minutes. Yet at the same time, roller hockey turns out to be somewhat forgiving of oldsters like me, especially if we have good hockey instincts. Because rollerblades simply can't stop on a dime or change direction quickly, roller hockey is a more languid, leisurely form of the sport. The game is full of curlicues and arabesques and gentle crashings into the boards. It rewards opportunistic, predatory players like me who know how to take advantage of loose balls and defensive lapses. The ball is much harder to control than a puck, making "possession" an absurdly tentative thing, and if you trail just behind the stickhandler or just on the fringe of a battle along the boards, you can find yourself the beneficiary of a play whose development happened without you.

The league consisted of five teams. Three teams were made up largely of players who knew each other and registered *as* a team, and the other two were made up of ragtag, randomly assigned folks like me. My team was named Miracle on Asphalt, and we quickly established ourselves as the league's doormat, getting hammered 9-2 and 7-5 in our first two outings before losing by a respectable 4-3 in game three (I tied the score at 3 with four minutes to play, but just as I was getting pleased with myself, we were trailing again). In the second week of play, the league posted its first "standings," which I saw when I showed up for game four: Miracle on Asphalt, in the league cellar, was the only team that had failed to win a game, but I was listed as the league's second leading goal scorer, with four goals in three games (a player named Dave Baranec was first, with seven).

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I noted that the large group of players with three goals contained a number of people who'd played only two games to date. Still, it went to my head. I was in the standings, alongside the real players; I might even be able to lead my team to its first victory. I was pumped. *Maybe today,* I thought, *if I can just turn it up a notch.* That day we played a team that called itself, simply, The Best Team. I scored three goals—my first hat trick since 1979. And we lost our fourth straight game, 12-3.

I have three bodily half-talents. I discovered each of them before I was twenty and developed each of them in exactly the same way: I became reasonably skilled at each in a short period of time, and then, when it became clear that any further progress would require emotional devotion and long hours of practice, I gradually sloughed off. Hockey was the first of these; golf, which I took up when I stopped playing hockey (like Happy Gilmore and any number of retired hockey players), was second; drums, in my sophomore year of college, was the third. All of these disciplines contain endless minutiae and literally infinite possibilities for improvement; for me, this was part of their initial appeal. Unlike, say, bowling, they have a fairly high minimum threshold of competence, requiring a certain level of physical proficiency before one can even think of participating in them meaningfully. In every case it took me almost a year to attain that skill level, but once I'd attained it, I thought of myself as a fast learner. I could establish a body-memory of how things were supposed to feel when they were done right, and I could find a groove in which mind and body worked in sync. But I never approached the level of patience—or single-mindedness—that it takes to become really *good* at something, and my learning curve quickly asymptoted until I was either feigning more talent than I had (as in drumming), leveling off at just-over-mediocre (as in hockey), or playing a bizarre Felix Krull impostor version of the game in which it was difficult to tell whether I was brilliant or awful (as in golf).

My little hobbies, my half-talents, all require elaborate apparatus. Golf alone is 90 percent paraphernalia and fetishes (head covers, tools for repairing ball marks, titanium woods, graphite irons, zebra-lined putters); drums, too, come with a lifetime supply of expensive accessories (miles of hardware, splash cymbals, roto toms, double-bass pedals, cowbells). I have very little tolerance for the trappings and technicalities of either, so I can never walk into a pro shop or a drum shop without being made to feel illiterate: *What swing weight and loft are you looking for in a driver? Why aren't you playing pinstripe heads with your SD4 combo jazz sticks? How much radial torque do you set your flange for?* All right, I made up that last question, but it's only slightly less intelligible to me than the first two. Yet the attitude of pros and salespeople is that I *should* have swing weight preferences and finely honed drumstick/drumhead concordances if I'm worthy of being a

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customer in the first place. I once traded notes on this subject with a friend who assured me that bicycle shops were every bit as intimidating as any of the shops associated with my hobbies, every bit as dominated by tech-heads who demanded to know why you weren't using GraphoMite if your CR-400 ratio was so low. Indeed, she told me that one salesperson finally sputtered that she shouldn't even *own* a bicycle if she was going to treat it so casually. "It was as if I'd abused a small animal," she said. "I thought he was going to take my bike away and turn me in to the Maintenance Authorities."

It is at such moments—and I have known many of them, particularly in New York's music stores on Forty-eighth Street, where you can't get the attention of sales help unless you're with the David Bowie tour—that I recall with relief the words of one of my drum heroes, the great Elvin Jones, formerly of the John Coltrane Quartet, who, when asked by *Modern Drummer* magazine whether he had gone to the eighteen-inch bass drum because it offered a "jazzier, poppier sound," replied that he'd bought such a small drum so that it would fit in the trunk of his car.

Hockey doesn't cultivate quite the same fetish culture, but it does require a good deal of protective gear, and players can get as religious about their brand of sticks or skates as any golfer devoted to a brand of balls or clubs. Appropriately enough, over the past two decades my frustration dreams about hockey, drums, and golf have usually taken the form of obsessive, low-grade nightmares about the equipment. Frustration dreams are born of long layoffs; I didn't play drums at all for four or five years at a stretch (1985–89, 1991–94), or golf for seven (1990–97), or hockey for almost eighteen. And when I haven't played something for a long while, I begin to have dreams about doing so, almost as if I can feel the aura of a phantom limb; but my dreams always follow the same frustration narrative, and I wind up dreaming about *not* playing. For instance, I'll imagine an evening when I'm supposed to play hockey, but I can't find the arena. When I do get there, I discover that I don't have my stick, or I've forgotten to pack my elbow guards, or my skate laces have broken and I can't get new ones, and I miss the game completely. Or I'll be setting up to play with my band, but my drumheads have split, or I don't have the legs for my floor tom, or I have to tighten a wing nut for half an hour, or there isn't enough room for me on stage and I'll have to set up downstairs while the rest of the band plays without me. Or I'll be all set to tee off, but I won't be allowed on the course without golf shoes, or the fairways will consist of deep gaping pits with bulldozers in them, or I'll have to putt the ball over a stone wall and onto a spoon. . . . You get the idea.

I suppose I can play golf or drums for as long as I have some reasonable control over the movement of my limbs. But with hockey, I figure I've got maybe three years left, five at the outside. After every game that summer, I counted my bruises; no hockey game can truly be "non-con-

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tact," any more than basketball can, except that our incidental collisions and entanglements happen at higher speeds. My forearms and lower legs were soon a particolored mess—partly because I tend to play where the ball is, but more immediately because my bruises didn't heal the way they did when I was eighteen, and the old bruises weren't gone before the new ones arrived.

Thirty-six is "young" in academe. In hockey, by contrast, the average professional player is about twenty-eight; there's only a handful of NHL players older than I am. Grizzled veterans Guy Carbonneau, thirty-nine, and Craig Ludwig, thirty-eight, have recently won the Stanley Cup with the Dallas Stars, but Wayne Gretzky retired at thirty-eight—just as gracefully as he always played. In the English department I still feel like a gangly adolescent; on the roller rink my teammates and opponents were largely undergraduates, and they treated me with a deference usually reserved for grandparents once they discovered that I could actually *remember* the Ford administration.

"At my advanced stage of decrepitude," a slightly older friend wrote to me last year, describing his waning basketball skills and his family's suggestions that he take up golf, "just saving face becomes a victory in itself." We were on e-mail, comparing notes on how our bodies were holding up over the summer in the face of defeats by graduate students and apple-cheeked women's studies minors. By now it was July, and for the first time in my life I was exercising all my half-talents at once. I'd been playing drums regularly for a few years, having formed a rock/noise band (Nastybake) with a pair of graduate students in 1994; now I was playing hockey again, and I'd even taken up golf for a third time, at the urging of a friend, the historian Jeffrey Herf. I did everything twice a week. I had found a groove. And like thousands of fellow teachers (and millions of students of all ages), I wanted the summer never to end.

Then came the day when I lost the groove and screwed up my schedule. My band had to move practice to Thursday afternoon; Jeffrey had made a tee time for early that morning; I had a hockey game at 6:30. For some reason, I refused to cancel anything. I was defying my inevitable decline and death; I was showing off for my family; I was in the middle of summer, having a blast; I thought I was twenty-five . . . and I figured that five hours of golf, two hours of band practice, and one hour of hockey would be a fine test of my body's capacity to move about in the world. Perhaps saving face would be the best I could do, but at least I was going to find out.

The temperature that day peaked at 98 degrees; the heat index was over 110. By the time I finished eighteen holes, just before noon, golfers were already starting to wilt in the sun, and a heat advisory had been issued. I'd managed to triple-bogey two of the first three holes and then rally (with two birdies on the front nine) for an 85; I'd missed most of the

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heat, but my shirt was still two shades darker than when I'd put it on. I drove home, changed, downed a light lunch and plenty of fluids, and got ready for band practice. Nastybake plays its share of frenetic and/or technically complicated songs, and practices can be physically draining; on a humid day, in a dank Champaign basement, I could go through two towels easily. On *this* day, we had to cut practice short. After only an hour, steam was rising from my forearms and my T-shirt and towels were literally saturated. "Musicians are supposed to die in plane crashes or from drug overdoses," I pointed out. "If we die of heat prostration, we'll be the laughingstock of rock and roll." And when I went home to change out of my second round of rank, heavy clothes, I realized that if my team was asked to wear dark jerseys for the game at 6:30, I might have to skate around in my Pittsburgh Penguins "away" jersey, solid black. A moving solar panel.

The evening was thick and torpid, and everyone wore T-shirts, white or gray. Miracle on Asphalt lost its fifth straight game; only five hardy souls had attempted to brave the heat. Thus depleted, we played with one "ringer," a lanky thirty-something graduate student more capable than myself, and though he and I both scored, our team was never really in the game. Sodden and very tired, I packed my things, trudged back to the car, drove home, drank two large bottles of water and a can of beer, and fell asleep for fourteen hours.

The next morning I felt as if I had spent the entire previous day drinking. I tried to tell myself I had actually devoted the day to physical activity, but all my body could say back to me was that it hurt to move about in the world. I stretched and tried to meditate. Around noon I finally ambled out of the house. Picking up my mail at the English department felt like a significant physical accomplishment. I persisted in this state until early Saturday afternoon, when my family decided to go out for ice cream. I hadn't eaten ice cream all year, and a few minutes after slurping down my "blizzard" or "snowdrift" or whatever, I felt a strange numbness on the right side of my face. When it didn't go away after a few minutes, I turned to my wife, Janet, and said, "Now *this* is weird. . . ."

Within the hour, Janet, a former cardiac intensive-care nurse, had given me a series of neurological tests, called our HMO's patient advisory nurse, and told me to get ready to go to the emergency room. By that time my facial paralysis was obvious: I could hardly close my right eye or move the muscles in my right cheek, and I was beginning to think that though I might be too old for hockey, I was too young for a stroke.

At first, the ER staff had trouble believing that anything was wrong with me. I had no other symptoms, the onset of the paralysis had been absurdly sudden, and to people who didn't know me, I didn't look terribly asymmetrical. Janet had to assure them that I didn't usually smirk like this, that I usually have a broad toothy smile. I was asked to walk a straight

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line, to grasp both the doctor's hands in mine, to touch my finger to my nose. I was asked to do all these things again. Then I was asked whether I had any cold sores. At last, when the doctor manually opened my right eye with ease even though I had tried to close both eyes as tightly as possible, he nodded and turned to Janet, saying, "Yep, it's Bell's palsy." She groaned sympathetically. I wondered if the doctor would proceed to tell me that I shouldn't even *own* a body if I was going to treat it this way.

Bell's palsy comes in many shapes and sizes. Sometimes it's permanent: Curtis LeMay, the general best known for insisting, as George Wallace's 1968 running mate, that we should bomb Vietnam back into the Stone Age, covered his severe case of Bell's by chomping on a cigar all day. Sometimes it comes and goes, lasting weeks or months, leaving faint echoes, permanent tics, or no traces at all (George Clooney had Bell's as an adolescent, but you'd never know it today). It's caused by viral damage to the seventh cranial nerve, but no one knows what brings on the virus. Normally an onset of Bell's is preceded by some other medical mishap, like an upper respiratory infection or Lyme disease (and, as researchers have more recently found, herpes simplex I, hence the question about the cold sores), but in my case it wasn't clearly triggered by anything at all. It's certainly not related to the consumption of ice cream, or playing golf, rock and roll, and roller hockey in the same day—though Janet surmises that I wore down my immune system and got zapped as a result. But whatever its cause and whatever its course, my Bell's palsy spoke to me of frailty and mischance and convinced me that my belated attempt to reclaim my body from the passage of time was surely doomed to failure.

It helped, and didn't help, that I appeared to have a rather mild case. Some of the major side effects of the disease are psychological; no matter how mild or severe the case, it's unsettling and depressing not to have control over your facial muscles, and the experience often throws people (as it threw me) into a real funk. As long as I didn't talk or smile too much, no one except my most intimate friends could tell that something was wrong: my right eye blinked more slowly than my left, and sometimes it stopped blinking altogether. (That's one of the most dangerous side effects of Bell's: corneal desiccation. Your eye gets dehydrated because it stops blinking and you can't sense it, just as if half your face had been injected with novocaine.) But once I began to speak, particularly if I had to say a lot of words with *f*'s, *p*'s, and *th*'s in them, I sounded drunk; and if I began to laugh, I looked mildly deranged. One side of my face could be in hysterics; the other said *we are not amused.* Laughter, the thing that binds me more often than anything else to my fellow humans, was suddenly the thing that made me noticeably different, an object of solicitude and concern. I learned this the next time I played golf, when I told my partners of a TV commercial I'd seen that cannily poked fun at golf's fetish culture (in this case, by pretending to be an ad for new plutonium

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clubs with lead-shield head covers) and found myself uncontrollably snickering and spitting out of the left side of my mouth.

Drooling can be a problem for people with Bell's. So can headaches behind the ear. So can sleeping. On all three counts I was getting off light. Still, in order to make sure that my right eye stayed sufficiently lubricated during the night, I went through an icky regimen every evening of squirting gel under my eyelid, placing gauze over the eye, and taping the gauze firmly in place. On the first morning after I began this routine, I discovered that it doesn't matter whether you remove tape quickly or slowly when it's covering your eyebrow. It hurts like the devil either way. Throughout each day I doused my eye with artificial tears, and I started a round of steroids to relieve swelling in the nerve. Janet bought me a black eye patch, which she declared "cute" and my children declared "weird." "You're the Bell's Pirate," my wife said, offering me a kerchief for my head, which I agreed to wear if she would let me shave my head and pierce my ears.

Of all things: a disease that afflicts your face—and only half your face—and nothing else. For an indefinite period of time, I would be two-faced. "Janus-faced," Janet said, helpfully, trying to get me to see the rich philosophical possibilities of my condition, the long fascination we humans have had with facial anomalies, from Cyclops to the Elephant Man. "Well, now," I replied, "Janus-faced is better than two-faced, I suppose. But let's not go putting eyes in the back of my head just yet."

Even though I had no other symptoms, I *felt* infirm. I was an egg again. I missed Miracle on Asphalt's game six and was out of town for game seven, traveling to Washington (with my eye patch) on business. By the time I got back, my team was 0 and 7, having lost 4-3 and 12-1 in my absence. I suggested to Janet that I would like to play in our last game, in however debilitated a state. We played the team that had beaten us 7-5. I flipped a wrist shot past their goaltender on the short side to open the second period, our captain finished off a nice passing play ten minutes later, and at the end of regulation time we were tied, 2-2. Five agonizing minutes of overtime produced nothing. We went for the final tiebreaker, the shoot-out: each player, in turn, taking the ball from the center red line and coming in alone on the goalie. Unlike soccer shoot-outs, ours would be "sudden death": first team to score wins, if their goal isn't immediately matched by the other team. My teammates tapped me to go first. But I hadn't worked out in almost two weeks, and by this point I wasn't sure I could even skate half the length of the rink, let alone control a ball and shoot. The moment was tense and dramatic. I tried to milk it for all it was worth, but as I came in on goal and tried to fake the goalie to his right, he deftly and anticlimactically poked the ball off my stick. We eventually lost the shoot-out on the fourth round, and thus lost the game

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3-2 in double overtime. But at least we had completed our perfect, winless season.

Or so we thought. Over the next couple of days, I gradually tapered off my steroids, decreased my lubricants, and stopped test-smirking out of both sides of my face, until I could manage a decently Reaganesque "heh heh heh" smile that was marginally wider on one side than the other. I began to work out again, to try to play golf, and to restart the painful process of body reclamation that had been interrupted, over the past decade and a half, by graduate school, children (with disabilities and without), tenure, teaching, writing, and Bell's palsy. And then I learned that my summer hockey season wasn't quite over.

It was the sportswriter Dick Young, I believe, who once quipped that if World War II had been run like a hockey season, Poland would have made the play-offs. Sure enough, Miracle on Asphalt had qualified for the play-offs—because team five, bless its heart, couldn't field enough players for a regulation game. So the league decided Miracle on Asphalt would "pick up" the extra players from team five, and play the first-place team in the first round of a two-round play-off. The first-place team had already beaten us 9-2 in the opener and 12-1 in one of the games I'd missed. Its name was Phat Hope. And against it, I knew, we had Phat Chance.

Tuesday, August 5, three weeks after being hit with Bell's palsy, I was going to bring my eyedrops and my elbow pads to the rink and try to play one last hockey game. I had every reason to beg out, and an hour before game time, I almost did: while packing my blades, I noticed that my right rear wheel had been worn down almost to the bearings. There was no way I could play for an hour on asphalt on that wheel. Panicking, I hopped in the car, in full gear (save for the skates), and drove to the nearest active-lifestyle outdoors-equipment store to buy some new wheels. I knew I could save thirty or forty dollars by buying wheels from a sporting-goods place rather than the local canoe/skiing/Timberland joint, but I didn't have the time to spare. I thought I could run in, pick out a set of wheels, and get to the rink just in time to change the one dead wheel.

No such luck. When I told the sales help I needed hockey wheels, they asked me for hardness and circumference numbers. I knew one but not the other. "Uh," I said, "I'll get the skates. They're in the car." Running back into the store, I told my salesman I would need 72-millimeter wheels. All he had was 76 and up. "But," he said, flipping through a book labeled the "Rollerbible," "your skates, the Spiritblades"—I hadn't even known their name—"will take a 76. And it looks as if you could change all your wheels, anyway."

I agreed, but informed the nice man that I had to play in half an hour, and asked him to make sure that his wheels would fit in my skates. To my chagrin, this meant removing my current wheels. "You were playing on 78As?" he asked, incredulously, referring not to the circumference but to

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the hardness. Oh God, I thought, here comes the technical lecture. *Your swivel base is set at six point five? You shouldn't be allowed to* wear *skates like this.* I was playing on soft 78s instead of hard 84s, I replied, because I started skating on a hard-rubber surface when I got the things and never changed the wheels. This only provoked a second round of questions, this time about the ball bearings. As any technically competent blader will tell you, ball bearings come in different varieties of frictionlessness: there are the ABEC-1s, which are kind of sticky, the ABEC-3s and -5s, which enable you to roll delicately and effortlessly, the ABEC-7s, which are used by those particularly finicky pros who can sense a pea underneath ten mattresses, and the ABEC-9s, which are made chiefly for the aerospace industry. I have 3s. "The problem with your 3s," I was told, "is that they burn so quickly. If I were you"—oh, help—"I'd go with ABEC-1s with the copper core, because they can handle the stops and starts better. You may get a smoother glide with the 3s, but you'll have to keep replacing them if you play on asphalt."

Every word this man said was true, and every word would have been helpful in some other context. But for now, I was facing a scenario out of one of my frustration dreams: I would have to get to the game, get out my skates, loosen eight screws (four in each skate), remove the wheels, pop out the casings and the ball bearings, clean the bearings with Speed Skate Lube (a kind of WD-40, but not WD-40, because WD-40 is lethal on skate bearings for reasons that elude me), reassemble the wheels, and rescrew them into the skates. In less than twenty minutes. I figured I'd miss the first period, and maybe nobody would miss me. After all, I probably shouldn't even own rollerblades, the way I treated mine.

I did make it to the game, and somehow changed all my wheels just in time for the opening face-off. A miracle on asphalt, indeed. But it's hard to play hockey when your eye is full of artificial tears. Our team was somewhat stronger: we had help from our free agents from team five. Then again, we were playing a team that included one of the University of Illinois's star players, a lean, graceful twenty-year-old with considerable speed and great peripheral vision. Janus-faced, perhaps. The man could change directions, stickhandle now-you-see-it-now-you-don't, and pass cross-rink in the same motion—and he had three or four fine skaters and shooters to pass to as well. Miracle on Asphalt rarely executed a decent passing play. Phat Hope looked as if they'd played together since childhood.

They scored first, of course, and not long thereafter, they scored next. But somehow we tightened our defense, put a shadow on their star, and stopped the bleeding. I started coming back deep into my own zone, making sure Phat Hope didn't have anyone standing alone near the net. (The rap against me always was that I was an indifferent two-way player, a liability on defense. Like all raps against me, this one is only partly true.)

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At the end of the first period, we were down only 2-0. Between periods, as we sucked on water and Gatorade, we congratulated ourselves for staying close. I squirted a few more artificial tears into my right eye, leaving my sight too blurry to allow me to start the second period, and insisted to my teammates that if we scored the next goal, we would change the complexion of the game, forcing Phat Hope to play more conservatively and maybe make a few mistakes in their own end. I was some cheerleader. In my heart, I figured that if we played well we could keep the score around 6-0 or 7-0.

On my first shift, five minutes into the second period, I managed to pickpocket a Phat Hope defenseman behind his own net; snagging the ball, I whisked a pass out to one of our guys from team five, a strong, solid player named Dan, and he slapped it under their goalie's outstretched left leg so quickly that no one, including myself, saw the play. Even the referees were caught off guard, unsure of whether the shot had clanked off the post or off the base of the net. But it really was a goal, and just like that, we were back in the game. Meanwhile, Phat Hope wasn't clicking. Their offense sputtered and miscued, and we began to see glimpses of actual weakness: some of their defensemen, it appeared, weren't all that sure-handed—not nearly as daunting or as fast as their forwards. "Forecheck, forecheck," we began to yell to each other, urging ourselves to put pressure on the defense and make them cough up the ball in their own end. It didn't work; Phat Hope continued to outplay us, but not by so wide a margin now. As the second period wore on in the August sun, we began to think we might at least keep pace with these guys.

Late in the period we had our own defensive lapse. One of our defensemen had overcommitted in the far end of the rink, allowing Phat Hope to break out of their zone with three players bearing down on our lone remaining defenseman. Desperately, I turned and tried to catch their streaking forwards. They slowed, trying to set up a play; I covered one of their wings, but not the ballcarrier; and as they got off the shot and began a mad scramble in front of the net, I found myself on my knees ten feet in front of my team's goal as the ball rolled helplessly in front of our prone goaltender with players of both teams swiping at it wildly. Throwing myself my full length across the asphalt and extending my stick with one hand, I swept the ball into our goalie's glove and forced a stoppage of play, maybe even helped save a goal. But I couldn't get up. I was winded, I'd taken a stick to the midsection, and my right eye was stinging from dehydration. My teammates asked if I was okay as I got to one knee. I checked the clock: one minute left in the period. "I can rest between periods," I said. Noble words, and stupid ones, too.

But I was right: only thirty seconds later, we got the break we'd been waiting for. One of their defensemen faltered while trying to pass deep in his own zone, and he was stripped of the ball—which then came to me, off to the right side of the rink, twenty feet from the Phat Hope net. Dan

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was ahead to my left, by the side of the net, but I thought a pass here would be too risky—and I wanted to take the shot. Skating in, I head-and-shoulder-faked to my left, leading the goalie to think I was going to try to tuck it in the far side. He went down, and as he fell, I gently lifted the ball over *his* left shoulder on the near side of the net, a ridiculously slow, lazy shot that caught him going the wrong way.

And so we were tied, 2-2, at the end of the second period. Hell, we could even win this thing: after all, according to every known law of hockey physics, the team that scores a tying goal in the final minute of a period comes out flying in the next and goes on to victory. We had the momentum; we had the determination; we had the element of surprise; yes indeed, we were going to win our first game—by knocking Phat Hope out of the play-offs, no less. I gave myself an extra squirt of artificial tears. The third period, surely, would be ours.

In the middle of that third period, I scored my second goal of the game, and drew the applause of various spectators and a couple of players waiting for the 7:30 game. It was a solo effort, a breakaway; I'd plucked the ball loose from a defenseman forty feet from our goal, outskated everyone down the rink, and flipped a brisk wrist shot just under the crossbar, once again over the goalie's left shoulder. It was deeply gratifying. It's one thing to put on a burst of speed; it's another thing to keep control of the ball, shoot accurately, and score while you're skating at full speed; and it's still another thing to do this in the third period of a play-off game. And it should have been the highlight of my season. But by that point in the game, sadly enough we were down 6-2. We'd come out flat, nervous, hapless. Phat Hope had come out determined to put away these pesky Miracle on Asphalters and get back to playing *real* roller hockey, and they'd blistered us for three goals in the first two minutes, getting a fourth soon thereafter. We eventually lost 8-3.

We shook hands with Phat Hope after the game, congratulating them on winning and wishing them well in the championship match. I skated off the rink and began to undress, exhausted but strangely and pleasantly sated. We had lost, as we were supposed to, but we had given the game an urgency that no one on either team had had any reason to expect. Of course, I knew my feeling of mild euphoria wouldn't last. Tomorrow I'd be stiff and sore; in four years I'd most likely be through with hockey forever; in forty, if I lived so long, I'd be an old, hard-boiled egg. But for now, at least, I could crack a smile. The smile was a bit creaky and asymmetrical, I noted; my right cheek was still a little numb. Still, though I knew how inexorably I must succumb to all of the ordinary—and some of the extraordinary—frailties of human flesh, I knew also that I had managed to save face on this one late summer afternoon, and that was victory enough.

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Audubon and the Veiled Lady

CHRISTOPH IRMSCHER

After an exhausting, three-month-long trip down the Mississippi, John James Audubon arrived in New Orleans on January 7, 1821. With little more than his vaulting ambition to support himself and the family he had so recently left behind in Kentucky (his wife of twelve years, Lucy, and two young sons, aged eleven and eight), and cowed by the prospect of fast-approaching middle age, the thirty-five-year-old would-be artist had decided that it was high time to live his life's dream. Now, finally, as he wrote in his diary, he wanted to fulfill his "ardent Wish"—harbored, he claimed, "ever since a Boy"—to "Compleat a collection of the *Birds* of our Country, from *Nature* all of Natural *Size.*"

New Orleans was to be more than just an episode in the colorful, gloriously unpredictable life that had taken Audubon from Saint-Domingue, where he was born in 1785 as the illegitimate son of a French captain and slave trader, to France, where his family unsuccessfully tried to turn him into a sailor, and then—with the prospect of immediate conscription into Napoleon's army looming over him—back again to the New World. Audubon came to the United States in 1803, the year of the Louisiana Purchase, with a forged passport and a hazy knowledge of

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English. In Kentucky, he embarked on a variety of business adventures, most of them spectacular failures. As his resources dwindled, his aspirations soared. While still in France, he had begun to sketch, casually, the birds he had seen on his wanderings in the woods and fields around Nantes. In America, spare-time fun had turned into professional obsession. Uncontaminated by any systematic instruction in the arts or, for that matter, in ornithology, and with no money left to lose, Audubon remained confident that his growing collection of birds would eventually become "a valuable acquisition." He had come to New Orleans, the Paris of the American South, to find out just how.

Along the banks of the Mississippi, Audubon had heard the mournful cries of the beautiful ivory-billed woodpeckers. He had seen the noble bald eagles mate and build their nests. He had sketched a loon, several hawks and grackles, and a tern, whose light flight, with bill "perpendicular over the Watter," he admired greatly. How sweet it was, he exclaimed at the beginning of the new year, "to find Myself . . . in a Country where the woods are filled with Warblers, Thrushes, and . . . the Rivers and Lakes covered with all kinds of Watter Birds—." Now, as his sluggish keelboat pulled into the harbor of New Orleans, droves of "fish crows" (ospreys) greeted him grimly, hovering near the docks. They were "dashing down to the Watter Like Gulls for food," Audubon wryly noted in his diary, as if already discerning some symbolic portent behind the unappealing sight.

His stay had begun inauspiciously. During a stopover in Natchez, one of his portfolios with fifteen previously completed bird paintings, "Three of Which Were Non Descripts," had been lost. On his arrival, the weather—"rain, Warm, the Frogs all piping"—had turned unrelentingly bad, making it harder for him to tour the city and find the work he so urgently needed. When, at the end of his first week in the Crescent City, Audubon shot one of the ubiquitous "fish crows," he had to compete for the corpse with flocks of other ospreys, "who appeared as if about to Carry him off." The birds of New Orleans were either desperately hungry or dead, torn to pieces, mutilated beyond recognition, covering, in sorry heaps of plucked feathers and severed limbs, the tables of the public market, "the Dirtiest place in all the Cities of the United States." Once Audubon thought he had espied some purple gallinules there, but his exhilaration passed quickly when he realized their little bodies were so mangled "that I could not see one fit to draw." On January 8, a pickpocket stole his wallet. Small wonder that, wandering the streets of "a Busling City where no one cares a fig for a Man in my Situation," Audubon found himself "tormented by many desagreable thoughts."

The letters he was receiving from the unhappy Lucy, still reluctant to join her meandering husband, had become less supportive than ever of his strange pursuits: "to day I rec^{d} a letter from My Beloved Wife who rufled My Spirits Sadly," he wrote in his diary on January 18. Audubon had left his

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long-suffering Lucy in the lurch before, but never had he absented himself so thoroughly from his duties as husband and father. As he had during earlier periods of penury, Audubon tried to turn his luck around by painting live people as well as dead birds, a combination of activities that led to amusing juxtapositions in his diary entries: "Began a Likeness of Mr Louallier—and Drew a Common Gull—" (February 1). Often, however, such portraiture (always in black chalk, since he hadn't yet mastered oils) would involve further disappointments, since sitters, restless while they posed, showed surprising patience when waiting to pay their debts.

It must have been around that time—in February 1821—that Audubon was hired, under mysterious circumstances, to take the portrait of a lady whose identity has kept his later biographers guessing. For ten days, he went to an undisclosed location and drew a beautiful young woman in the nude. His diary, now known as the *Mississippi River Journal,* has little to say about this extraordinary experience, except in retrospect, and then with the same mixture of indignant surprise and know-it-all self-importance that we can expect from Audubon when he is really down in the dumps: "I met this morning with one of those discouraging Incidents connected with the life of the artists," he writes on February 21, as if he had recently pored over Vasari's *Lives of the Artists.* "I had a Likeness Spoken of in very rude terms by the fair Lady it was made for, and perhaps will Loos my time and the reward expected for my Labours." Throwing caution to the wind, Audubon even identified the insolent customer: "Mrs *André* I here mention the Name as I May speak more of the Likeness as the occasion Will require—"

A later "occasion" indeed necessitated further discussion of the incident. "Mrs. André" (or, as she is cryptically called, "A.X dry") resurfaced in an account that Audubon embedded in a taunting letter penned to his wife on or around May 23. "Thou art not," Audubon wrote provokingly, "daring as I am about Leaving one place to go to another without the *Means.*" He was "sorry for that." He, for one, would "go to England Without *One Cent*" and, unlike her, not be afraid. Pretending that he wanted to satisfy her curiosity about the *"Fair Incognito"* who, a few weeks earlier, had made him the gift of a gun, Audubon promised a "word for Word" account of the event, "as true as Surprising," which he claimed he had taken straight from his journal.

Had he perhaps removed these pages so that his sons, for whose future diligent perusal he had originally planned to memorialize his Southern sojourn, would not by chance or circumstance come across them? If so, the rather risqué narrative Audubon then goes on to share with his wife—written in a manner so markedly different from the other, disjointed diary entries penned during these months (all of them the hasty jottings of the on-the-spot-experiencer rather than emotions recollected by the artist in relative tranquillity)—must be a deliberate modifi-

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cation and not a clean copy of the original entry. Now Audubon no longer mentions any altercation with "Mrs André" over portrait or payment. In fact, the rough treatment he originally claimed to have experienced at the hands of his ungrateful sitter has turned into happy approval—which further suggests that the pages Audubon sent his wife in May 1821 were not a verbatim transcript of what had actually happened between the artist and his elusive model, but a version deftly doctored to stir up his wife's jealousy, a testosterone-powered potboiler with generous references to female nudity. Or so it seems.

Audubon's roving eye had already manifested itself, unpleasantly, in earlier diary entries—for example, when he complains that he hasn't yet seen any "handsome women" in New Orleans, or when he ogles, from a distance, the Creole women dancing at a ball (which Audubon, short of the dollar required for admission, cannot attend). But nowhere has he been as explicit about the turmoil of his senses as he is here. In his letter, Audubon dramatically implores his Lucy to be "carefull" with the information he was imparting to her: "if thy Brother W[illiam] Should tell thee he will Keep it snugg Show it him—No one else for some Years—." Decades later, Audubon's meddlesome granddaughter Maria, who burned many of her ancestor's manuscripts so that she could safely rewrite them for publication in a form inoffensive to her own narrow sense of propriety, for once respected his wishes. In fact, she must have been delighted that at least in this instance she seemed to have Audubon's authorization to suppress biographical material that she deemed prurient. Characteristically, she attached her own caveat to the file in which Audubon's letter is now kept by the American Philosophical Society: "Odd leaves of Grandfather's Journal 1822 [*sic*] Not used + not for general reading as he decided. MRA."

Audubon's "Fair Incognito" letter, known to previous biographers and quoted by at least some of them in cautious snippets and sanitized excerpts, has never been published as Audubon wrote it. The following text, from my forthcoming Library of America edition of his *Writings and Drawings,* is a scrupulous rendering of the holograph manuscript, retaining Audubon's unconventional or inconsistent punctuation. Omissions in the text are Audubon's own; where his failure to indicate terminal punctuation might confuse a modern reader, a space is inserted. Quotation marks have been added where an opening or closing mark was omitted, and deleted where they seemed redundant. Editorial interventions are enclosed in square brackets.

The following is from my Journal Wrote after the all [whole]—

I was accosted on the day of x 1821, at the corner of Street & Street[—]the former I take allmost daily not to be seen so much on

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Levée Street tugging my Port Folio, the astonishment of many—by a femelle of a fine form but whose face thickly covered by a Veil that I could not then distinguish it and who addressed Me quickly in about the following words in French—"Pray sir are you the one sent by the French Academy to draw the Birds of America" I answered that I drew them for my pleasure, "You are he that draws Likenesses in Black Chalk so remarkably strong", I answered again that I took Likenesses in that Style. "then call in 30 Minutes at N^{0} in Street and walk upstairs I will wait for you"—I Bowed, "do not follow me now—" I bowed again and as I went from her the course I had at first, took my pencil and put down the Street and Number; I soon reached a Book store where I waited some time having a feeling of astonishment undescribable, recollecting however how far I had to Walk, I Started and suppose the Stranger Employed a Carriadge—

I arrived, and as I walk^{d} upstairs I Saw her Apparently waiting "I am glad you have come, walk in quickly." my feeling became so agitated, that I trembled like a Leaf—this She perceived, Shut the door with a double lock and throwing her veil back Shewed me One of the most beautifull face, I ever saw "have You been or are you Married" yes madam "Long" 12 Years "is your Wife in this City" no Madam "Your name Audubon" yes madam "Set down and be easy" and with the smile of an Angel "I will not hurt you" I felt such a blush and such Deathness through Me I could not answer. She raised and handed Me a Glass of cordial, so strange was all this to me that I drank it for I needed it, but awkwardly gave her the glass to take back—

She sat again imediatly opposit me, and looking me steadfastly ask^{d} me if I thought I could draw her face—indeed I fear not answer^{d} I "I am sure You can if you will but before I say more what is Your price"? Generally 25$ she smiled again most sweetly "will you keep my name if you discover it and My residence a secret"? If you require it "I do You must promess that to me, keep it for ever sacred although I care not about any thing else" I promised to keep her name and her place of residence to Myself "have you ever Drawn a full figure" Yes "*Naked*" had I been shot with a 48 pounder through the Heart my articulating Powers could not have been more suddenly stopped. "well why do you not answer" I answered Yes; She raised walk^{d} the room a few times and sitting again Said, "I want you to draw my Likeness and the whole of my form naked but as I think you cannot work now, leave your Port Folio and return in one hour be silent."

She had Judged of my feelings precisily, I took my hat She open^{d} the door and I felt like a Bird that makes his escape from a strong Cage, filled with sweet meats. had I met a Stranger on the stairs No doubt I would have been suspected for a Thief. I walk^{d} away fast looking behind me—

My thoughts rolled on her conduct, She look^{d} as if perfect Mistress of herself and yet look^{d} *I then thought* too young not supposing her more

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than Sixteen (a mistake however) and apparently not at all afraid to disclose to my eyes her sacred beauties—I tried to prepare myself for the occasion, the time passed and I arrived again at the foot of the Stairs.

She again was waiting for me and beckoned to me to move quick, She shut the door as the first time, then coming to me "Well how do you feel now, Still trembling a litle, what a Man you are—come, come, I am anxious to see the outline you will make, take time and be sure do not embellish any parts With your brilliant Imagination, have your paper Suficiently large, I have some beautifull and good Chalks, the drawing will be compleated in this room and You will please do it on this" raising She gave me a Large Sheet of Elephant paper out of an *Armoire.*

The die was cast, I felt at once Easy, ready and pleased—

I told her I was waitting for her convenience, She repeated the urgency of Secrecy which I again promessed—

The *Couch* in the room was superbly decorated She drew the Curtains and I heard her undress. "I must be nearly in the Position you will see me unless your taste Should think proper to alter it by Speaking" very well was my answer Although I felt yet very Strange and never will forget this moment "please to draw the Curtains and arrange the light to Suit yourself." when drawing hirelings in company with 20 more I never cared but for a good outline, but Shut up with a beautifull young woman as much a Stranger to me as I was to her, I could not well reconcile all the feelings that were necessary to draw well, without mingling with them some of a very diferent nature—

Yet I drew the Curtain and saw this Beauty. "will I do so" I Eyed her but drop^{d} my black Lead pencil "I am glad you are so timid, but tell me will I do so" perceiving at once that the Position, the light and all had been carefully Studied before, I told her I fear^{d} She Look^{d} only too well for my talent—She Smiled and I begun—

I drew 55 Minutes by my watch, when She desired I should close the curtains—She dressed in an Instant and came imediatly to look at what was done—

"Is it like me? will it be like me? I hope it will be a likeness. I am a litle Chill, can you work any more without me to day." I told her I could correct my Sketch "Well be contented and work as much as you can, I wish it was done, it is a folly but all our Sex is more or Less So." She remarked very appropriety an error and made me correct it—She pulled a Bell, a Woman came in with a Waiter covered with Cakes & Wine, left it and passed through a door I had not perceived before—She insisted on My resting a while, made me drank, asked me a thousand questions about my familly, residence, Birds, Way of travelling of living &^{c} &^{c} and certainly is a well informed femelle, using the best expressions and in all her actions possessing the manners necessary to Insure Respect & wonder—

I worked nearly Two hours more and Casted all the outlines of the Drawing, it pleased her apparently very much I soon found She had

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received good Lessons, I begged to know her name "not to day and if you are not Carefull and silent you never will see me again" I assured her I would "I have thought well of you from hear say and hope not to be mistaken".

I felt now very diferent thoughts from those I had while She was undressing in her curtains and ask[d] when I must return again "every day at the same hour untill done but never again with your port folio I will manage this once through your drawings of Birds". for Ten days at the exception of one Sunday, that She went out of the City, I had the pleasure of this beautifull woman's Company about one hour naked, and Two talking on diferent subjects, She admired my work more every day at least was pleased to say So, and on the 5th sitting she worked herself in a style much superior to mine—

The second day She desired to Know What I would ask her for my work, I told her I would be satisfied with whatever she would please give me "I take you at your word it will be *un Souvenir* one who hunts so much needs a good Gun or Two, this afternoon see if there is one in the City & give this on a/c if you wish to please me to the last" She handed me five Dollars "I must see it and if I do not like it you are not to have it." I thank[d] her and told her it proprably would be a high price piece "well that probably is Necessary to insure the good quality, do what I bid." I took the note, when gone, felt very undetermined, Yet I hunted through the stores, found a good one & gave the Note on a/c with my name, telling the Shopmen that I did not well Knew when I would Call for it.—She was much gratified I had found One, when I told her I was asked One hundred and Twenty Dollars "No more well we will say nothing about it untill I see how I am pleased with your part." I worked from day to day, drawing besides a 25 Dollars Likeness every day, to be sure a litle at the expense of my Eyes at night, but how could I complain, how many artists would have been delighted of such lessons.

I finished my Drawing, or rather she did, for when I returned every day I allways found the work much advanced, she touch[d] it she said not because she was fatigued of my company daily but because She felt happy in mingling her talents with mine in a piece She had had in contemplation to have done, even before She left the country She came from. I supposed from Italy or France but never could assertain—

She often took my pencil to compose a devise to have engraved on the Gun Barrels, and ask[d] me to have one of my own, but this I declined and left to her taste and will. She at last decided on one which she said I must absolutly have done for her sake and ordered me to have it finished in a few days.

She had a beautifull frame the last morning I went, on which she ask[d] my opinion, this of Course I gave as I thought her desires inclined. She put her Name at the foot of the Drawing as if *her own* and mine in a dark Shadded part of Drapery; when I had Closed it and put it in a true light She gazed at it for some moments and assured Me her wish was at

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last Gratified, and taking me by one hand gave me a delightfull Kiss—"had you acted otherwise than you have, you would have received a very diferent recompense, go, take this (125$) be happy think of me sometimes as you rest on your Gun, Keep for ever my name a secret" I begged to kiss her hand, She held it out freely—We parted probably for ever—

it is well that I should say that She had heard of me in a circle a few days after I had taken the B.C. Likeness [unidentified] and of my collection of Birds that she then understood, I was from France purposely sent by the Academy of Paris, but soon was assured of the contrary by my way of living; and that she ask[d] me to try my veracity—that she employed a servant to watch my ways and that for several nights this servant had remained very late to see if I absented from the Boat and that in fact She knew every step I had taken since the day She had resolved on employing me. she ask[d] Me if I had not seen a Mulatto Man standing near the Gates of Madame A.X dry. two days Successively; this I recollected but never supposed that any one watch[d] my Steps—She praised the few drawings of Birds I shewed her the first day and assured me that She had no doubt I would be well recompensed for Such a Collection—

She never ask[d] me to go see her when we parted, I have tried several times in vain, the Servants allways saying Madame is absent. I have felt a great desire to see the Drawing since to Judge of it as I allways can do best after some time.

here My Journal takes to another subject. and I Leave to thee to conclude what thou may of this extraordinary femelle—

Since, I have wished often I could have Shewn that Drawing to M[r] Vanderlyn.—

The Lady was kind, the Gun is good and here is the Inscriptions on it—Ne refuse pas ce don d'une amie qui t'est reconnaissante puisse t'il t'égaler en bonté—and under the Raming Rod—Property of Laforest Audubon February 22[d] 1821.—her name *I* Engraved on it where I do not believe it will ever be found—

Some of the facts behind Audubon's fanciful account can perhaps be verified—assuming that Audubon's pen slipped and "A.X dry" is indeed a cryptic reference to his sitter's secret identity. The fading pages of Paxton's *New Orleans-Directory and Register* from 1822 list a "Madame André, widow," who lived, appropriately, at 26 Amour Street. Audubon's black-chalk study is no longer extant, but we might, after all, have a likeness, if fully attired and from a different hand, of Audubon's "Incognito." In 1826, Louis Antoine Collas of Bordeaux (1775–1856), one of the first European painters to visit New Orleans regularly, painted a miniature of a "Mrs. Andry," identified as a member of the Andry family, once

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active in the French and Spanish colonial militia and now the owners of a plantation in St. James Parish. Collas's little gouache on ivory, now in the Louisiana State Museum, shows a young woman in a yellow dress that wraps tightly around her slim waist but freely exposes a perfect neck. Her fair hair is rigidly parted in the middle and her small lips are firmly shut, making her eyes, of a color somewhere between amber and slate gray, the most remarkable feature in a face that one doesn't easily forget. Heavy-lidded, as if from chronic lack of sleep, these wonderful eyes look directly at the viewer with an expression wavering between wry amusement and indefinable sadness.

We'll never know for sure if this is indeed Audubon's veiled lady unveiled (though I would like to think that this is the face he looked at in 1821—lovely and haughty, resolute yet elusive, young yet experienced, and just a trifle contemptuous). In any event, the results of my speculative sleuthing pale next to the simple power of a story that can stand on its own. Audubon's portrait is lost, but we don't really need it: his letter to Lucy creates a picture as powerful as if Audubon had drawn it in chalk. Describing himself as a "man who never looked into an English grammar," Audubon once claimed, with unnecessary modesty, that he was but a "poor writer." For *Ornithological Biography,* a 3,000-page text intended as an in-depth commentary on his *Birds of America,* he enlisted the services of William MacGillivray, a Scottish ornithologist, whose job it was not only to check the scientific facts but also to "smooth down," as Audubon said, "the asperities" of his prose. No wonder Audubon's biographers have claimed that he was only "marginally literate" (John Chancellor) or that he was a "writer only of necessity" (Alice Ford).

In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. In the present text, notwithstanding its grammatical idiosyncrasies and helter-skelter spelling, the pleasure the writer takes in his performance is palpable. Note how skillfully he handles narrative time, tartly withholding from his readers the exact moment of his first surprise meeting with the lady, informing them where he *wasn't* ("not . . . on Levée Street") but neglecting to tell where he *was.* Lingering on the woman's "thick" veil, Audubon delays a second encounter with her (and the clarification it could possibly bring) by merely another "30 Minutes." It is as if the very soul of New Orleans, dark and inherently foreign—the city that would later be described by writer Grace King as a skittish, irresistible woman playing elaborate games with those who come to woo her—had accosted Audubon, asking him to join her in her chambers. Having put his reader on tenterhooks, Audubon suddenly admits his own mystification, "a feeling of astonishment undescribable," and changes from omniscient yet unhelpful author to perplexed character. Like his reader, he is now himself merely a confused gatherer of clues: "I . . . suppose the Stranger Employed a Carriadge."

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A second, extended encounter follows, in the anonymous room reserved for the rendezvous. The scandalous conditions of the veiled stranger's contract are spelled out ("I want you to draw my Likeness and the whole of my form naked"), and an agitated Audubon is again released for yet another hour: "I think you cannot work now. . . ." After his return, Audubon draws the naked lady for "55 Minutes," rests, and then continues for "Two hours more." Note the meticulous tallying of the time that has elapsed. Note also how adeptly Audubon constructs his narrative here around fragments of dialogue in which his mysterious sitter is always the active instigator and he the near-silent interlocutor, abashed into seeming inarticulateness. Besides characterizing the tortuous relationship between the nervous artist and his assertive model, this also helps Audubon to build up and manage narrative tension. For example, the staccato-like repartee of the first longer exchange between sitter and prospective portraitist turns conversation into breathless interrogation. The air in the room thickens: "'have You been or are you Married' yes madam 'Long' 12 Years 'is your Wife in this City' no Madam 'Your name Audubon' yes madam." The reader is not surprised to learn a little later that, prior to hiring Audubon, the mysterious but savvy "Incognito" had had him unobtrusively followed and spied on by one of her servants.

In this re-creation of an ostensibly sensual experience, sense impressions are rendered with great precision. Along with Audubon, we can almost hear the fabric of her dress rustle as the lady behind the curtains, inviting yet evading the portraitist's prying glances, disrobes in preparation for the first session—just as we hear Audubon's pencil drop dully to the floor when, finally, the curtains part. Far from being mere props, the door with the double lock, the decorated couch, the armoire that contains the large sheets of paper used for Audubon's portrait, the hidden door through which a servant suddenly emerges carrying a tray laden with refreshments, all acquire the same strange tangibility as Audubon's mute embarrassment over his inexperience as an artist (and as a man). It is ironical but fitting that the "elephant paper" provided by the lady for her portrait is exactly the size of paper Audubon was using for the drawings of his largest birds, and later for the print folio of the *Birds of America*—double elephant sheets more than three feet high and more than two feet wide. All of Audubon's images are oddly appropriate, mirroring as they do his demotion from artist-in-control, who proudly draws not for the academies but for his own "pleasure," to compliant fulfiller of his sitter's wishes. This swift regression is due to much more than the simple fact that the lady is his employer and he the hired portraitist. Audubon trembles helplessly "like a Leaf" in a strong wind, and he flutters like the bird that, its stomach filled with sweet fruit, is expelled from the prison it has come to like. In a drastic extension of the imagery of

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victimization, he also compares his feelings to being "shot with a 48 pounder through the Heart." A newly coined word captures what can only be described as, literally, *mortification:* "I felt such a blush and such Deathness through me I could not answer." What seems like lexical insecurity actually generates greater accuracy of expression and authenticity of feeling. Mockingly, the "Incognito" taunts her hapless portraitist: "Still trembling a litle, what a Man you are."

It is an indication of Audubon's talents as a writer that what could have become another tale of male wish fulfillment instead turns into a clever inversion of the classic myth of Pygmalion. Here the person portrayed creates the portraitist and not vice versa—a splendid metaphor for the artistic anxieties the self-taught Audubon must have felt at the murky outset of his distinguished career. Obviously, the "Incognito's" portrait was not one of those images of female nudity that have been lambasted by the art critic John Berger, in which the woman, compliantly supine, is the surveyed object and the man, brush in hand, the lordly surveyor. Nakedness, in Audubon's story, is not a state to be stared at, but a challenge to the artist's representational powers, an example of life anticipating, and mocking, art: "perceiving at once that the Position, the light and all had been carefully Studied before, I told her I fear[d] She Look[d] only too well for my talent—She smiled." Audubon's sitter, a "perfect Mistress of herself," confirms her power over her own image, even sharing in the actual production of the portrait to the extent that, seizing the artist's chalks, she completes it herself: "I finished my Drawing, or rather she did." How embarrassed Audubon must have been to discover not only that his lady could draw, but also that her artistic skills seemed to surpass his own! It seems only appropriate then (and is registered by Audubon without further complaint) that the "Incognito," in a rather extraordinary final gesture, signs her own portrait—relegating his, the actual artist's, name to a "dark Shadded part of Drapery." She truly has become the *subject,* not the object, of her portrait.

One needn't be steeped in Freud to smile at the symbolic possibilities of the gun that Audubon is allowed to purchase in lieu of financial compensation—a comical inversion, less phallic than pathetic, of male empowerment. "Think of me sometimes as you rest on your Gun." Adding one further turn of the screw of male humiliation, the lady wrests Audubon's pencil away from him to draft herself the motto that she wants inscribed on the gun: "Don't refuse this gift from a friend who is in your debt—may it equal you in goodness." But then, in an ironic and unexpectedly generous reversal of her signing of the portrait, the lady engraves not her own but "Laforest" Audubon's name on the gun—where it matters the most, under the ramrod. ("Laforest" or "woodsman," *homme de la forêt,* was, significantly, the epithet Lucy had used to address

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Audubon during their courtship. Here it becomes a less than subtle gibe, on Audubon's part, in his wife's direction.) Conversely, Audubon signs the lady's name on the gun—where it cannot be seen and "where I do not believe it ever will be found." On this note, the curious ballet of sitter and portraitist is concluded.

In the weeks after the picture's completion, the "Incognito" denies Audubon the opportunity of another look at their joint handiwork. His artistic disenfranchisement seems complete, and his disappointment is evident: "I have wished often I could have Shewn that Drawing to M[r] Vanderlyn." Lacking further access to his work, Audubon cannot even brag about it to fellow artist John Vanderlyn, whose *Ariadne Asleep on the Island of Naxos* (completed in 1812 and exhibited, in 1821, at the McCoy and Scallon auction house in New Orleans) had been the first full-scale study of a female nude in the history of American painting. But when Audubon is confronted with Vanderlyn's *Ariadne* a few weeks after meeting the "Incognito," his previous loss of control as a portrait painter returns as the source of new insight. Through humiliation has come humility—and knowledge. Staring at Vanderlyn's painting with his "Eyes *half Closed,*" Audubon notes a serious error in the artist's treatment of the female figure—absent, thank God, from his own attempt at nude representation because of his sitter's expert intervention: "saw a great Deffect in One of his figures of Women, (the deffect that had being Corrected by the Lady I drew Lately.)"

Whatever the personal motives behind Audubon's letter to Lucy of May 23, 1821, may have been, it tells a story not of failure but of the beneficial power the so-called object can have over its surprised delineator—a story of how a model may, on occasion, mold and master the amazed artist, who gratefully steps back so that reality can take over and position itself, correctly, on the canvas. Writing about a nude portrait, Audubon has, in a sense, denuded himself and thus created another brilliant fiction—a complex comment on the artistic credo behind the representations of birds in their habitats, which he was already producing for his monumental *Birds of America.* These compositions—in which, to borrow a phrase from Henry James's later story about portrait painting, "the real thing and the make believe came into contact"—were never just portraits of birds, but, at their magnificent best, paintings about art and the difficult making of art. Here, finally, it had become impossible to separate the object from its maker.

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Practice Without Principle

The Two Cultures, Out of Step

WENDY STEINER

The scientists I know—genome mappers, Alzheimer's busters—are happy intellectuals. Not for them the humanist's anomie. The gardens they cultivate give forth publicly approved fruits, and whatever ethical danger their new knowledge may pose, they have no doubt that knowledge exists and that they are expanding it. For some in the academy, these are heady times.

But not for all. Pity the poor humanist, and especially one so incautious as to agree to speak at a conference called "Science & Literature," as I did not long ago. In the 1950s, the opponents in the "Two Cultures" debates were evenly matched: on both sides they were tweedy men who believed in truth and thought their path toward it was the right one. Their educational backgrounds gave them the tools to understand if not agree with each other, and they felt equally entitled to a place in the university. My experience of late has been quite different. Like most of my humanist colleagues, I no longer compare my practice to that of scientists. Nor could I do so in any but a Dadaist manner, having never studied any science at the university level or pursued mathematics beyond set theory, which I experienced as a cross between IQ tests and doodling. I am not proud of my ignorance, or happy about the intellectual limbo of contemporary humanistic study. Neither am I quite confident about the claim commonly made by humanists, including myself on occasion, that scientific knowledge and facts are no more grounded than those in any other area of inquiry. Moreover, the image of humanistic

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scholarship that I get from scientists—a cross between kindergarten teaching and creative writing—bears no resemblance to what I do. Alienated, daunted, I girded my relativism and my dronelike social non-utility in preparation for a conference with the "real researchers."

Expressing my misgivings to a friendly medical dean, I mentioned that the title of my paper would be "Practice Without Principle." "Oh," he said, "you're going to talk about the lack of ethical guidelines in medical practice—assisted suicide, abortion, that sort of thing." "No," I said, "I'll be talking about the practice of criticism when it's carried on with no shared method or assumptions or even subject matter, when it departs entirely from a scientific model." His brow furrowed, and he suggested that I look into the case of Dolly the sheep. "I'll bet cloning has a lot to do with literature," he said.

This is the way, I imagine, that most scientists see the dilemmas of literary critics in this post-post-structuralist moment: as irrelevant to their practice, and, finally, as intellectually embarrassing. But we in the business are still hopeful that our academic discipline can continue, even when its practitioners agree on virtually nothing. Thomas Pynchon has given us an image for such a state of blissful disarray: a deaf-mutes' ball, with a roomful of couples, each with its own internal music, dancing without bumping into the others. It is an "anarchist miracle" and every humanist's dream—that literary criticism can carry on as such a harmony of idiosyncrasy. But the current dance of criticism is far from Pynchon's ball. Despite our hopes and wishes, it has become a graceless stagger, unharmonious, disingenuous, and decidedly not miraculous.

Our forays into science must appear particularly absurd to practitioners of the Other Culture. Here we go, bowdlerizing Einstein and Heisenberg in our discussions of indeterminacy, appropriating Freud when no psychology department would touch him with a barge pole, savoring Thomas Pynchon when he tropes on the third principle of thermodynamics or Tom Stoppard when he plays with catastrophe theory. *We* know what we think of science: ultimately, it must be in the same leaky boat as we are. But somehow scientists seem neither concerned about the state of their craft nor convinced that we are actually with them on board. Their government grants may have decreased, but they still get ample funding, carry out lab experiments, posit paradigms, and push them to the point of breakdown. They are still in business, whereas we appear to be at play, but without knowing the rules of the game.

Tom Stoppard presents the humanist half of the Two Cultures even more bleakly. In his espionage drama, *Hapgood*, it is the scientist, a Russian nuclear physicist named Joseph Kerner, who revels in the connection between indeterminacy and art. Kerner is not only a physicist but a double (or triple or quadruple) agent. In contrast, his British spymaster, Blair, is a humanist with an Oxford B.A. in classics. Blair sees his mission

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in life as upholding the unchanging Western values he learned in public school, and to do so he must find out which side Kerner is actually on. But for Kerner, this question does not permit an easy answer. One's allegiances are as tricky as light—sometimes they're waves, sometimes particles. It all depends on who's looking and what they're looking for. Kerner believes that everyone enshrines this duality—that we are both ourselves and our doubles. The square root of 16 is both 4 and -4, he says, and even Blair is not what he appears.

"Your cover is Bachelor of Arts first class, with an amusing incomprehension of the sciences, but you insist on laboratory standards for reality, while I insist on its artfulness," Kerner tells Blair. Finally a scientist understands the aesthetic nature of reality; it is the humanists who are the flat-footed objectivists, looking for security in an outdated model of science.

Kerner's indeterminacy, however, invites a different danger: the intrusion of the personal and the sentimental into judgments of truth. Kerner was "turned" to the West by the woman who is now head of British espionage operations: Hapgood, also known as "Mother." She got her code name because when it came time for tea, she, as the only woman in the office, "played mother." But she is also the mother of a boy, Joe, whose father, secretly, is the physicist-spy Joseph Kerner. Kerner is also Hapgood's "joe"—in spy jargon, her agent, and in Scottish argot, her lover. Stoppard entangles spycraft not only in physics but also in love. And that is its vulnerability. We can see the problem when Kerner explains to Hapgood his views on the indeterminacy of knowledge.

> There is a straight ladder from the atom to the grain of sand, and the only real mystery in physics is the missing rung. Below it, particle physics; above it, classical physics; but in between, metaphysics. All the mystery in life turns out to be this same mystery, the join between things which are distinct and yet continuous, body and mind, free will and fate, living cells and life itself; the moment before the foetus. Who needed God when everything worked like billiard balls? . . . The man who took the certainty out of Newton was Einstein. *Da!*

This space for metaphysics becomes in the play an opening for God, love, family, and nostalgia for homeland (*"Toska po rodine"*). The whole affective world enters through that metaphysical gap.

Contemporary humanists have come to occupy this space more and more. Since science cannot provide "laboratory standards for reality," indeterminacy has authorized humanists to explore the personal. So has literature itself. Throughout the 1990s, memoir and autobiography have dominated American culture. As the novelist Mary Gordon complains, "I entered the cave of memory, which nowadays seems like a tourist trap in high season. Everyone's talking about memory: French intellectuals, his-

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torians of the Holocaust, victims of child abuse, alleged abusers." Literary critics, faced with such testimonies, have succumbed to the imitative fallacy. The flight to the personal has already acquired a title: "intimate criticism." In it, the critic becomes an autobiographer, the classroom a confessional; and readers and students, like priests, find themselves under some obligation to be forgiving.

For example, in an essay entitled "Last Will and Testament of an Ex-Literary Critic," published in *Lingua Franca,* Frank Lentricchia admits to a doubleness worthy of Stoppard's physicist-spy: "I once managed to live for a long time, and with no apparent stress, a secret life with literature." This life seems to have involved Professor Lentricchia's comporting himself like a gun-toting theorist in public, while underneath beat the heart of an achingly responsive reader. "My silent encounters with literature [were] ravishingly pleasurable, like erotic transport," he confesses. But when political correctness began to dominate the academy, the conference bully gave way to the classroom enthusiast. "Anybody here like literature?" Lentricchia would ask his puzzled Duke undergraduates. Nowadays, he shuts the classroom door and allows literature to speak through him. "Behind closed doors . . . I become something of a rhapsode. As Plato says in the *Ion,* rhapsodes are enthusiasts. We're out of our minds. Like all rhapsodes, I like to recite from the text. I tell my students that in true recitation, we're possessed, we are the medium for the writer's voice."

I confess to some sympathy for Lentricchia's views, though the voice speaking through the rhapsode sometimes sounds suspiciously like the conference bully. In *The Scandal of Pleasure,* a book published four years ago, I described myself as a disappointed quasi-scientist.

> I believed [when I began my career] that criticism should model itself on science. It should have a framework of defined terms, accepted axia, and shared methods whose aim was to provide accurate descriptions of artworks and to reveal the principles underlying categories such as genres, styles, and forms. I was therefore much taken with semiotics and structuralism with their links to the Unified Science Movement, and though I denied that such views were formalistic in the strict sense, I had little patience with historical or biographical approaches. When people advocated art appreciation, I snottily replied that you do not catch a physicist claiming he did his job because he liked light!

Probably the most sophisticated applications of such thinking to literature were the poetic analyses by the great linguist and aesthetician Roman Jakobson. As a graduate student, I was exhilarated by the intricacy and foundedness of his descriptions and the productivity of his generalizations. Yet I would be the first to agree that the more definitive these

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analyses became, the less one felt impelled to do the same with other texts. What would be the point of describing the phonological, syntactic, and semantic levels of every poem? It was wonderful that it could be done, to be sure, but, almost for this reason, it became unnecessary to keep doing it. It was what Jakobsonian analysis could *not* achieve that seemed the challenge: to understand art in relation to history, milieu, authorial life and belief—the whole messy, conjectural sphere of extra-artifactual meaning.

Since the 1970s, semiotics and structuralism have passed by like a dream in the frantic succession of critical theories, so that by now, identifying oneself with a particular approach to literature seems a fool's game. "Aesthetic theory over the past twenty years reminds me of a shooting gallery," I wrote, hoping to cover my professional despair in cheerful simile. "Up pops a duck, only to be shot down and replaced by a new duck bearing a certain family resemblance. Formalism, structuralism, semiotics, Marxism, feminism, the New Historicism—the approaches keep perpetrating their little murders, transforming ducks who have barely shed their down into dead ducks piling up in English departments."

As valuable as the precision of semiotics and structuralism seemed, they were responsible for a ghastly parody of science: endless essays coining terms, proliferating typologies, using art merely to justify or exemplify emergent categories. "I have given up on being such a scientist," I confessed. And then came the Lentricchiesque moment:

> It has taken me a long time to admit that the thrust of criticism is the "I like," and whatever expertise I have accumulated conspires in this admission. The authority of one's institution of higher learning, one's academic credentials, one's ever-increasing experience may establish "objectively" one's claim to being an expert, but at the heart of any critical act is a subjective preference. To like, to find important, at this time and in such-and-such a situation: this is the essence of the critical act.

Well, there it is. Deep down, I suppose, I do not believe that science at this moment has a lot to say to literary criticism. In Stoppard's ladder of scientific explanation, classical physics offers a "laboratory standard of reality" that has only a partial application to the study of the arts. True, there are verifiable facts about art: all that strict formalism investigated, all that archival historians attempt to ascertain. And yet this realm of fact does not explain the interaction between a work and a reader or viewer or listener, except through the crudest statistical assumptions, and scientists would surely turn up their noses at the imprecision of such findings.

Particle physics is equally problematic as a scientific model for criticism, though of course there are some surface similarities. In particle physics, science would appear to be subjective: the nature of reality depends on

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whether one is looking and what one is looking for, and no single account of reality is descriptively adequate. As assumptions, these are criticism-friendly. Even so, where for science they have produced the exhilaration of a paradigm shift, such notions have just about undone the criticism of the various arts as university disciplines. In particle physics, there is not an endless set of explanatory possibilities for light, but merely more than one. The particulars of a given physicist's psyche and upbringing do not justify the result of her inquiries, though no doubt gender, class, race, language, and nation help condition a scientist's access to and interest in specific problems.

Above all, science seems to go on—convincingly—in the midst of its current complexities, whereas criticism is in a state of real uncertainty. The outside world thinks of literary critics as overindulged layabouts who neglect their teaching in order to produce books and articles that are incomprehensible even to other critics. Within the field, though literary scholars still doggedly produce "work," there is so little agreement about its aims, methods, and even subject matter that giving a paper or teaching a class seems like a foray into Looking-Glass Land.

Take post-colonial scholarship, for example, an approach concerned with the ideology of empire as reflected in the arts and general culture of European countries and their colonies, both before and after independence. Post-colonialists argue that everything in a culture is conditioned by the structure of political power within it. But even here, the absurdism of current criticism is apparent. At a recent conference on modernism, for example, a prominent post-colonialist critic spent her time on stage inveighing against the policies of the World Bank. Another called on critics to search for universals in art, arguing that the DNA of men and women or whites and blacks is virtually identical. Are we not to be surprised when a post-colonialist critic bases an ideological position on science, stressing biological essentialism over cultural difference? And are we not to wonder at the intellectual conditions of a criticism in which there is nothing that cannot be asserted or denied, in which the study of literature encompasses anything that can be referred to in a work of literature? Under these circumstances, literature departments are no different from conservatories, training performers of various sorts—rhapsodes, demagogues, pedants, journalists—and the choice of which to become or which to approve is itself just a matter of personal preference. As far as I can tell, the changes produced by Einstein have not been as subversive to the scientific disciplines.

How have we gotten into this fix? Perhaps the answer is that we have abandoned the train of thought that began in the eighteenth century and carried us more than halfway into the twentieth. It was called aesthetics, resolved itself into formalism and structuralism, and had among its most fundamental assumptions the idea that the study of art

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should be what we would now call a discipline: sharable, principled, containing standards of verification for its claims—in short, something like a science. The founding move in virtually every eighteenth-century aesthetic theory was to discard the unpredictability of individual responses to art in favor of the stability of an objective standard of judgment, and to build aesthetic discourse on that objective basis. We have become thoroughly disillusioned with this move for some very good reasons, but we have no idea how to proceed in its absence.

We might note a few key moments in the history of aesthetics in which the "disciplinary move" was made. David Hume's 1757 work "Of the Standard of Taste," for example, differentiates between sentiment and judgment: "a thousand different sentiments, excited by the same object, are all right: Because no sentiment represents what is really in the object." But judgment relates to features that inhere in objects; their presence is statistically verifiable by anyone who cares to look. Hume's contemporary, Edmund Burke, went so far as to claim that the standards of both reason and taste are uniform in "all human creation." As Hume put it, "Whoever would assert an equality of genius and elegance between OGILBY and MILTON, or BUNYAN and ADDISON, would be thought to defend no less an extravagance, than if he had maintained a mole-hill to be as high as TENERIFFE." This uniformity persists across time as well. "The same HOMER, who pleased at ATHENS and ROME two thousand years ago," says Hume, "is still admired at PARIS and at LONDON."

The statistical criterion—ask any sane person—depends on the uniformity of both sensory organs and sentiments among healthy people, but aesthetic judgment for the eighteenth century was also a function of practice, experience, and delicacy. And here the statistical claim shifts imperceptibly to an elitist one in which certain people are universally recognized as having an extraordinary delicacy of taste, and hence are deferred to in matters of judgment. It is unclear whether their ability depends on innate sensitivity, extensiveness of experience, or a third category: the ability to abstract themselves from the specificity of their time and culture. Hume says that the work must be received by me "considering myself as a man in general, . . . [forgetting] my individual being and my peculiar circumstances." How extraordinary that the postcolonialist at the conference should embrace universals, considering the effacement of context and self that this move entails!

Most famously, Immanuel Kant distinguished between the *agreeable,* which is subjective, and the *beautiful,* which is objective. "Many things may be charming and agreeable to [the man of taste]; no one cares about that. But if he proclaims something to be beautiful, then he requires the same liking from others; he then judges not just for himself but for everyone, and speaks of beauty as if it were a property of things." For the "*Beautiful* is what, without a concept, is liked universally." Its concept-

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lessness is directly related to the disinterested interest with which it is experienced. And here we arrive at a Kantian paradox: "*Beauty* is the form of the *purposiveness* of an object, so far as this is perceived in it *without any representation of a purpose.*"

At this point, the pieces are all in place for the formation of a literary-critical or aesthetic discipline. The critic can identify the beautiful because the beautiful appears as an objective property of artworks, uniform across cultures and periods. It can be discerned by anyone with sufficient sensitivity and training, but most reliably by those we would now call experts. The only thing missing for the founding of a modern literature department is a belief in the value of vernacular literature and in the need to disseminate higher education across the population. These arose a century ago, at which time departments of national literatures were established in American universities. Though early literary studies often concentrated on questions of historical influence or humanistic morality, the central disciplinary impetus for criticism in this century has been formalism, in all its modern guises.

In America, the New Critics were the most influential formalists, dominating literature departments from the 1940s through the 1960s. For them, the work of art was an irreducible object that could be described only qua object, and not through its relations to its creator or audience, as W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley explained in their articles on the intentional and affective fallacies. This principle forced an increasing emphasis on textual construction, the technical factors in the work that make it what it is. Meaning and form were inseparable in the New Criticism, and so any paraphrase of a poem would be inadequate to it, a position memorably stated in Cleanth Brooks's "Heresy of Paraphrase." It was in the thing-quality of literature that its value lay, for, being irreducible to its paraphrase, it could not turn into mere pseudo-statement or pseudo-philosophy. Instead, it delivered up the fullness of reality as such—what John Crowe Ransom called the "world's body." As both the British and the American New Critics insisted, the critic's job was to describe the art object so as to make this fusion of form and meaning evident. When this happened, the reader of the criticism or the student in the classroom would come to appreciate the beauty of the work of art, inducted into the ever-enlarging circle of judgment that the academic study of vernacular literature was meant to create.

And this is the key point. The Neo-Kantianism of the New Criticism and of many formalist movements of the twentieth century was related to the pedagogical aims of its practitioners. Formalism made criticism "disciplinary." English departments could claim a stable object of study and describe that object through shared assumptions and approaches that could be *taught.* Poems could be objectively described. Their descriptions were not the same as the poems, to be sure, but neither is physics the

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same as light. The critical descriptions were technological devices meant to unlock the secrets of art. Once exposed to those secrets, one could recognize them in other artworks and formulate one's own descriptions. Formalism created the basis for a quasi-scientific structure of investigation and a quasi-scientific social organization of investigators. However much the New Critics might argue over basic principles and posit their identity in opposition to what they saw as the philistinism, mechanization, and abstraction of science, insofar as they functioned as members of a discipline within a university and attempted an objective account of a shared subject matter, their activity was to some degree modeled on science. And it was their formalist assumptions—developing out of eighteenth-century aesthetics—that made that modeling possible.

Compare the situation in our day. The list of canonic texts from which doctoral students in English at my university select fifty for their oral examinations has expanded to five hundred. After some faculty members pled for a reduction on the grounds that they had not read all of this purportedly essential canon, our students agreed to reduce the number to four hundred. None of us has yet read them all. They are not only not *the* canon, they are not *a* canon, and the particular set of fifty books any student may select will differ greatly from those of his or her peers. In scientific disciplines, it is not up to students to choose what constitutes basic knowledge, since the discipline itself defines its object of study, however much this might change over time. Can you have a discipline without a shared object of study? Probably not. But you can have a critical conservatory, and that might be all right, too. As to method, today anything goes, and we pride ourselves on our toleration and our students' varied allegiances. We never fail anyone, not because we think they all have passed but because in some way, from some standpoint, there is value in at least some of what they say. We have gone from English literature to English and American, to the British Empire and the literatures of the Americas. And we have grown from disciplinary scholars to interdisciplinary ones. The scope of literary criticism has grown as well. I recently spoke at another university on the subject of civility. There is certainly no topic that my graduate training less prepared me to address.

Of course, the history of aesthetics is not made up solely of formalists. It contains many voices that would in fact welcome the current state of affairs. For example, Nietzsche takes Kant's disinterested interest to task, claiming that "the fight against purpose in art is always a fight against the moralizing tendency in art, against its subordination to morality." On the contrary, all art praises, glorifies, chooses, prefers. "Art is the great stimulus to life; how could one understand it as purposeless, as aimless, as *l'art pour l'art?*" One could go all the way back to Plato for such views, and forward into the heart of post-modernism. But no matter how

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long the pedigree or how powerful the currency of this anti-formalism, it does not lead to a discipline of literary study. The professional treatment of literature has been distinguished from that of the amateur precisely on the ground that it focuses on art's essence rather than on its morality or utility. When contemporary critics denounce formalism on the grounds that it is not value-free, disinterested, or even coherent in its claims, they are at the same time effacing the distinction between professional and amateur criticism.

To put this apocalyptically, the move to undermine formalism, standard in post-structuralism and all that has followed, marks the end of literary criticism as a conventional university discipline and the end of any close analogy between its operation and that of science. On all kinds of grounds, this is a good thing. But since the study of literature still goes on in universities alongside science, with the same structures for evaluation, the same sort of departmental organization, and the same pattern of career development, the contradictions involved in critical life have become extremely trying. It is very difficult to inhabit a discipline that is not disciplinary, and particularly hard to train students in it. A chemist I know told me that most scientists do not know and do not need to know the history of science, since most of it is irrelevant to current practice. I sometimes think that *all* we can teach these days is the history of criticism, since, in the absence of shared principle and coherent disciplinary practice, the only things we can explore collectively are the ideas and events that have brought us to this state.

The infamous Robert Mapplethorpe trial in Cincinnati was a crucial chapter in the humiliation of formalism. Holding up one photograph of an arm thrust into a pair of buttocks and a second of a man urinating into another's mouth, the prosecutor asked an expert witness to explain under oath why these should be considered works of art. The expert said that the photograph of fisting was art because of the "centrality of the image" in it, and that the other was art because of its beautiful diagonal. The defense won, but probably not because of this witness. Any account of the aesthetic value of these works that does not consider their moral, social, historical, and, indeed, physiological impact would seem doomed. And yet as soon as one includes these factors, the disciplinary boundaries of criticism are breached and one ends up speaking as a rhapsode, demagogue, pedant, or journalist.

The alliance that has recently been forged between the law and the arts is eroding aesthetic disciplines further. The law protects art from censorship on the ground that it contains ideas, and according to the legal scholar Daniel S. Moretti, "All ideas having even the slightest redeeming social importance—unorthodox ideas, controversial ideas, even ideas hateful to the prevailing climate of opinion—have the full protection of the guarantees." It is good that the law can save art from censor-

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ship, but unfortunate that this rescue undermines the conception of art that has permitted it to be studied within a discipline. From a formalist perspective, the treatment of art as idea renders it indistinguishable from non-artistic representation. Novels become interchangeable with political tracts, art photos with billboards. And as a natural corollary, the authority of the expert to construe artistic meaning is no greater than that of the historian, sociologist, politician, TV commentator, or, indeed, any construer of meaning.

Again, for many people, this is not a tragic state of affairs. The experts' take on art has not in the past been harnessed to the public good, and has increasingly seemed eccentric, even to educated laymen. The public is more and more disenchanted with art experts in the academy and outside it. The sudden interest in Outsider Art is symptomatic of this alienation. Whether artists are Outsiders because they are insane, poor, non-white, or rural, their one common feature is that they have no formal art training. This lack of contact with experts makes it impossible for them to function within the system of problems in which twentieth-century mainstream artists operate. The academy, as a result, has been silent about them. Moreover, they pose a devastating threat to formalism. Outsider Art is frequently indistinguishable from kitsch (a huge model of the *Cutty Sark,* for example, executed in popsicle sticks; a painting of Adam and Eve in the Garden, with pretty flowers and birds in the trees), but it may be equally indistinguishable from the practice of mainstream, "high" artists. Cubist collage, the Dadaist "found object," abstract expressionist splatters, magic-realist cityscapes, book art, Rauschenbergian assemblage, and Pop appropriation are staples of Outsider Art, except that the collage does not derive from cubism, the found objects from Dada, and so on. Formally comparable, the artifacts of Outsider and high art are often totally disjoint in source and meaning.

In short, though the study of the arts purports to share its disciplinary structure with science, the analogy between the Two Cultures is growing ever more tenuous. And it is not only the relativism of the humanities that is to blame, but the understanding of art in the law, politics, and popular taste as well. Under the circumstances, try as I may, I cannot see what the case of Dolly the sheep has to do with literature. But having said that, I know *someone* will. It is just a matter of time before we open the pages of *PMLA* and find essays entitled "Dolly's Dilemma: Cloning and the Family Romance," or "The Mytochondrium Is the Message," or, most fatuously, "The Critic as Clone."

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Corn

JEAN MONAHAN

The teeth of the dragon are fat and yellow.

To sow them is to grow an army:
rows of soldiers with straight loose hair.

One wants order, simplicity,
but the truest path runs crooked.

How many patterns yearn
to be random?

Mosaics dismantle, the tiles broken.
Cobblestones buckle and trip downhill.
Pearls unstring.
We all fall down.

There's a madness in method;
why not mimic it?:

water taut as a butterfly wing
fluent over river stones,

the gold spots on the chrysalis,
speckle of gecko.

Husk, gently, your swaddling clothes.

Each kernel a key, each ear a song.

Music begins the moment you listen.

Jean Monahan is the author of two books of poetry: *Hands* and *Believe It or Not* (recently published by Orchises Press).

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The Invisible Man and the Invisible Hand

H. G. Wells's Critique of Capitalism

PAUL A. CANTOR

When H. G. Wells died in 1946, his place in the history of twentieth-century literature seemed assured. At his funeral, J. B. Priestley referred to him as the "great prophet of our time." Shortly thereafter, Prime Minister Clement Atlee headed a Service of Public Homage for Wells, at which Winston Churchill spoke to honor his memory. During his long literary career, Wells had been one of the most popular and financially successful writers in the English language. Moreover, he was admired by the general public as a sage or visionary, so revered that in his later years he could command audiences with Stalin and Roosevelt. But today Wells is seldom taken seriously, and if he is discussed in literary circles at all, it is almost always among specialists in science fiction. In the long run, authors are remembered for what literary critics say about them, and Wells was never embraced by the professional literary establishment. As popular as his books were (or perhaps precisely because they were popular), they have at best hovered on the periphery of the academic canon of twentieth-century literary classics. Most critics concluded that Wells was the loser in the famous debate on the nature of fiction that he carried on with Henry James in a series of essays, reviews, and letters. Advocating an aesthetic perspective, James emerged as the

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champion of modernist fiction, above all its sophisticated handling of point of view, while Wells, who valued content over form and social message over artistic technique, seemed like a throwback to the nineteenth century, incapable of appreciating the epistemological subtlety of the avant-garde novel.

We are left with a paradox: as the founder of the genre of science fiction, Wells is perhaps the greatest prophet of modernity, and yet literary critics classify him as the antithesis and antagonist of modernism. No one wrote more extensively or prophetically about characteristically twentieth-century developments, from air power to the atomic bomb (Wells coined the phrase), from international finance capital to experiments in socialism, from world wars to the horrors of colonialism. From the literary critics' point of view, Wells's sin was to write about modernity, but not in the style of modernism.

As we near the end of the century whose course Wells did such a good job of predicting back in the 1890s, the time seems ripe for a reassessment of his reputation, or at least a re-examination of his importance in modern (if not modernist) literature. Whatever Wells's fate has been within the academy, the general public has never deserted him. His great science fiction novels have stayed in print continuously and, made and remade as motion pictures, they have helped shape the consciousness of twentieth-century humanity around the globe. *The Time Machine, The Island of Doctor Moreau, The War of the Worlds, The Invisible Man:* if any works can lay claim to the title, these are the myths of our modern world. *Independence Day,* the blockbuster hit of the summer of 1996, was a transparent rip-off of *War of the Worlds,* with a computer virus cleverly substituted for the bacteria that defeated Wells's invading Martians. However unsophisticated Wells's stories may be in narrative technique, they evidently have a power that keeps them alive in the minds and hearts of the public.

Moreover, at a time when literary criticism has come to focus increasingly on economic, social, and political issues, Wells may deserve a fresh look. In economic terms, he was one of the most influential writers of the twentieth century. He did as much as anybody to shape the course that socialist theory and practice took in modern Britain; he may also be regarded as one of the architects of the welfare state. Wells believed that the only rational economy is a command economy, one in which a board of experts scientifically plans, directs, and coordinates all economic activitiy from its central position, thereby keeping entrepreneurs from pursuing their individual interests. He hoped that the twentieth century would be the century of socialism, the era when humanity finally took responsibility for its destiny and planned centrally for its future. As we come to the end of the twentieth century, the cause of socialism—in both theory and practice—is, to say the least, not looking as robust as Wells would have hoped. Thus our re-evaluation of Wells should include a

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critical look at his socialist ideas, to see how accurately he foresaw economic developments in the twentieth century. If his prophetic powers in economic matters were not as great as they were in science and technology, it is worth considering what may have distorted his vision in that area.

As a first step in this reconsideration of Wells, I have chosen to discuss one of his most enduring novels, *The Invisible Man*, which turns out to be one of the most interesting from an economic perspective. Though ultimately critical of Wells's achievement in the novel, I believe that, like many of his works, *The Invisible Man* has a greater depth of content and seriousness of purpose than has hitherto been realized.

First published in 1897, *The Invisible Man* tells the story of Griffin, the University College student who finds a way to make himself disappear. Driven to his experiments by an ambition that has always been fierce, Griffin grows increasingly megalomaniacal once he becomes invisible. He thus takes his place in a line of literary portrayals of mad scientists that stretches back to Mary Shelley's Victor Frankenstein. Interest in *The Invisible Man* has understandably tended to focus on the scientific aspects of the tale, especially the questions Wells raises about the ethics of modern technology.

But as often happens in Wells's work, the science fiction situation he creates in *The Invisible Man* provides a vehicle for exploring a larger set of economic and political problems that preoccupied him throughout his career. In particular, though Griffin's invisibility has scientific causes, it largely has economic effects—above all, on the movement and transfer of money. To put it bluntly, the chief use Griffin makes of his invisibility is to rob people of their cash:

> The story of the flying money was true. And all about that neighbourhood, even from the august London and Country Banking Company, from the tills of shops and inns . . . money had been quietly and dexterously making off that day in handfuls and rouleaux, floating quietly along by walls and shady places, dodging quickly from the approaching eyes of men. And it had, though no man had traced it, invariably ended its mysterious flight in the pocket of that agitated gentleman.

Wells calls attention to the difficulty of tracing the movement of money. In our age of offshore banking and money-laundering schemes, we hardly need to be reminded that the circulation of money can be mysterious even without a literally invisible man behind it. Perhaps, then, Wells's *The Invisible Man* is an economic as well as a scientific parable, with money as its central subject.

For Wells, Griffin's invisibility symbolizes the working of an impersonal, decentralized, and—in Wells's view—dangerously chaotic market

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economy that fails to respect the dictates of either traditional communal ties or established government authorities. In effect, what is most significant about Griffin is his invisible *hand.* In his *Wealth of Nations* (1776), Adam Smith had argued that in an unfettered market economy, an invisible hand guides the self-seeking actions of individual entrepreneurs for the good of the community as a whole. As a socialist visionary, Wells uses his parable of the Invisible Man to call Smith's economic theories into question, presenting Griffin as a monster of egoism and finding chaos and catastrophe where Smith had seen order and progress. Thus, *The Invisible Man* offers an opportunity to examine Wells's critique of capitalism, both the substance of his arguments and the motives behind his hostility to the free market.

The key to understanding *The Invisible Man* is the dual setting of the story. Most of the novel takes place in the rural village of Iping and other rustic parts of England. But in Griffin's flashback narrative of how he became invisible, the scene shifts to the urban metropolis of London. Wells juxtaposes the tradition-bound, community-oriented existence of a rural village with the *anomie* and rootless cosmopolitanism of a modern city. In moving from London to a country village, Griffin creates the novel's dramatic tension, a confrontation between antithetical ways of life. As Wells describes Griffin's situation: "His irritability, though it might have been comprehensible to an urban brain-worker, was an amazing thing to these quiet Sussex villagers." Wells portrays Iping as a tight-knit community: everybody knows everybody else and everybody minds everybody else's business. The citizens of Iping are closed-minded and superstitious, easily upset by anything that might disturb the regularity of their existence. In the opening pages of the novel, Griffin arrives in Iping as the quintessential stranger, unknown to anyone in the village and visibly alien by virtue of his grotesque appearance.

In these circumstances, the only thing that can guarantee Griffin's acceptance in Iping is money. The novel opens with a prototypical market transaction. Griffin gets a room at the inn, not because of "human charity," as he at first suggests, but because of his ability to "strike [a] bargain" and pay the going rate. Money in and of itself already confers a kind of invisibility on him. Even in a town of busybodies, he is able to remain anonymous; as nosy as the innkeeper is, she does not even bother to learn Griffin's name as long as he pays his bills on time. We thus see how money transforms a traditional community. The citizens of Iping are used to dealing face to face and only with people well-known to them—as one of the villagers says: "I'd like to see a man's face if I had him stopping in *my* place." But a complete stranger is able to live among them by virtue of the power of money, which stands for the impersonal working of the market.

One would think that Wells would welcome this power as a force for progress. As he himself demonstrates, a market transaction allows perfect

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strangers, who may even have reasons to be hostile to each other, to cooperate in a limited way for their mutual benefit. Money seems to be a way of greatly expanding the range of social interaction. And in Wells's portrayal, villages like Iping certainly could use some broadening of their horizons. On the whole, Wells treats the villagers comically, making us laugh at their conventionality and superstitiousness. Nevertheless, he seems to take their side, accepting their way of life as the measure of normality and presenting the Invisible Man as the sinister figure, the one who in his secretiveness and obsessive concern for privacy disrupts the peaceful functioning of the village community. Wells reserves his truly sharp criticism for the modern city—London.

In the London section of the narrative, Griffin's invisibility oddly comes to symbolize the weakness and vulnerability of modern man, the way he becomes a nonentity under the pressure of mass society, the way he gets lost in the shuffle of the urban crowd. Griffin has of course high hopes for what his invisibility will allow him to do, but once he actually becomes invisible, almost the first thing he discovers is how much trouble his new condition is going to cause him. Emerging triumphantly into the streets of London, expecting to "revel in [his] extraordinary advantage," Griffin finds himself instead buffeted by the mass of people in the big city: "But hardly had I emerged upon Great Portland Street . . . when I heard a clashing concussion and was hit violently behind. . . . I tried to get into the stream of people, but they were too thick for me, and in a moment my heels were being trodden upon." Hoping to be a god in the eyes of his fellow Londoners, Griffin at first finds that he is quite literally nothing to them. They walk right into and over him.

Griffin's invisibility thus becomes a striking image for everything Wells is trying to show about the impersonality of the market economy. In the small village of Iping, Griffin's problem is that all eyes are upon him: everybody wants to butt into his business. His problem in London is just the opposite: he is completely ignored. In London, no one knows anybody else, or at least a man can be virtually unknown to his next-door neighbors. Wells seems to suggest that even without his fiendish experiments, Griffin would be, in effect, invisible in London. The modern urban metropolis is a peculiarly attenuated form of community, in which people live together but have very little in common. Wells emphasizes this point by choosing as Griffin's London landlord "an old Polish Jew" who speaks Yiddish at a key moment. London is not simply a paradoxical community of strangers; it is a community of foreigners who sometimes do not even speak the same language.

For Wells, then, to be invisible in London is to be an individual in a vast, impersonal market economy that provides no genuine roots or community and hence turns a man into a purely necessitous being. Throughout the story Griffin is surprisingly obsessed with the basic human needs:

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food, clothing, shelter. He ends up embodying everything Wells finds wrong in capitalist existence. With nothing to stabilize his life, Griffin is always on the go, unable to find rest. He is continually scheming against his fellow human beings, always trying to take advantage of any situation. He encounters all the problems of the emancipated individual in the modern, enlightened world. In this context, it is highly appropriate that Griffin is a scientist, a man who tries to live by reason alone and who rejects all traditional religious beliefs. The villagers are particularly upset by his "never going to church of a Sunday."

Cut off from any sense of community, the Invisible Man becomes a monster of egoism, governed only by his own will and desires. As his colleague Dr. Kemp describes him: "He is pure selfishness. He thinks of nothing but his own advantage, his own safety." Thus Griffin serves as Wells's representation of *homo economicus*, the man who pursues his rational self-interest to the exclusion of all other considerations. In particular, the Invisible Man becomes Wells's symbol of the pure consumer. In a marvelous scene, Griffin invades the bastion of bourgeois consumerism, a department store. The phenomenon was sufficiently novel in Wells's day for him to feel compelled to have Griffin explain the concept: "[I] found myself outside Omniums, the big establishment where everything is to be bought,—you know the place,—meat, grocery, linen, furniture, clothing, oil paintings even,—a huge meandering collection of shops rather than a shop." Griffin's invisibility gives him access to the full panoply of consumer goods capitalism produces. But Wells adds a twist to his myth of the Invisible Man to suggest the self-defeating character of the capitalist economy and its consumer rat race. Although Griffin is able to acquire anything he wants, Wells dwells upon the difficulties he encounters consuming those goods. If he eats the food he craves, it renders him temporarily visible to his enemies until his body can assimilate it. If he puts on the clothing he covets, he becomes similarly vulnerable.

Griffin himself formulates his dilemma precisely: "I went over the heads of the things a man reckons desirable. No doubt invisibility made it possible to get them, but it made it impossible to enjoy them when they are got." Here Wells anticipates later, post-Marxist critiques of capitalism, particularly that of the Frankfurt School. Capitalism may succeed in allowing consumers to acquire the goods they want, but it prevents people from enjoying them. Indeed, by generating an infinity of desires and involving consumers in an unending process of acquisition, the market economy, in this view, dooms them to perpetual dissatisfaction.

However cleverly Wells employs the figure of the Invisible Man to develop a critique of capitalism, I believe that his critique fails. For one thing, its target is broader than he realizes. In most of *The Invisible Man*, Wells is not criticizing capitalism in particular but modernity in

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general. The aspects of life he questions—large-scale organization, urban existence, the masses of people, cosmopolitanism, rationalist and anti-traditional behavior—characterize all modern regimes, socialist as well as capitalist. If anything, capitalism mitigates the negative effects of mass society by dispersing economic power and preserving private pockets of resistance to the Leviathan state. The experience of socialist communities in the twentieth century suggests that in a centrally planned command economy, human beings are in fact more likely to feel like zeros, with even their rights to private property and private initiative taken away. As for Wells's point about consumption under capitalism, it rests on a false analogy. Nothing in the real world corresponds to the difficulties Griffin encounters in enjoying what he acquires; they are entirely peculiar to his situation as an invisible man. In fact, most consumers under capitalism want their consumption to be *visible*. Ever since Thorsten Veblen, critics of capitalism have been complaining about "conspicuous consumption." Wells may have a point in his critique of capitalist consumption, but his particular fictional vehicle for expressing it does nothing to prove it.

Indeed, Wells's central metaphor fails to work in one respect so fundamental that it obviates the need for a detailed, point-by-point refutation of his position. There is only *one* Invisible Man in Wells's story. Far from functioning in a market system, he enjoys a kind of monopoly. Hence he operates without the checks and balances that are vital to Adam Smith's notion of the invisible hand. Smith never denied that human beings are egoistic. But his point was that as selfish as individual people may be, when that selfishness is made to operate within the system of a market economy, it is forced to serve the common good. Thus Wells's science fiction parable fails to offer a fair test of Smith's economic principles. In fact, Smith would be likely to agree that making a man invisible would turn him into a monster of egoism, for it would set him free from the normal discipline of the market, where businessmen keep each other in check precisely by observing each other's actions, ever on the lookout for any competitive advantage. In Smith the individual entrepreneur is *not* invisible; indeed the working of the invisible hand depends entirely on the visibility of businessmen as they meet in open competition.

I prefer therefore to concentrate on analyzing not the logic of Wells's position, which is weak, but the motives behind his hostility to the market economy. The most peculiar aspect of *The Invisible Man* is the atavism of Wells's position. He generally sides with the backward, unsophisticated villagers against the forward-looking scientific genius, Griffin. Wells seems in fact to be guilty of economic and political nostalgia in *The Invisible Man*, looking back longingly to an earlier and simpler age when communities were small and tightly knit and human beings could count on directly cooperating with each other to solve their problems. Wells fundamentally distrusts the central insight of Smith and capitalist economics:

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that the market provides a way of rationally ordering the productive activities of human beings without the need for central direction or even without the actors knowing each other personally.

Wells shares the suspicions and fears of capitalism that typically grip the citizens of pre-modern and economically undeveloped communities. As Friedrich Hayek has argued in *The Fatal Conceit*, to such people the operation of the market economy looks like magic. The merchant, the entrepreneur, the financier—all these basic actors in the market economy apparently produce wealth out of nothing and thus, to the common man, seem like sorcerers. Wells's portrait of Griffin confirms all the common man's suspicions of the businessman: that he is unproductive, that he is secretive in his dealings, that all he does is move around money that belongs to other people, that essentially his acquisition is a form of theft, that he lives off the work of others. Like many people, Wells cannot understand or appreciate the special contribution that the entrepreneur makes to the good of the economy as a whole. In *A Modern Utopia*, he makes the revealing statement that "trade is a bye-product and not an essential factor in social life." In fact, the entrepreneur, by means of his special knowledge of market conditions and his willingness to assume risks in an uncertain world, makes it possible for goods to be available when and where people want them. Anyone who believes that the entrepreneur does not earn his profits is essentially claiming that we live in a risk-free world.

Like many nineteenth-century Englishmen with socialist leanings, Wells had trouble accepting the messiness and apparent disorder of the complex system of the market economy, which works precisely by dispersing economic knowledge, power, and control. Wells was not overtly nostalgic for the Middle Ages and its feudal system in the way Thomas Carlyle and William Morris were, but he did, in effect, return to medieval ways of thinking in his insistence that order has to be imposed on society from above—that only with leaders centrally directing economic activity can it take a rational form. Throughout *The Invisible Man*, we can see that Wells does not like the idea of a character operating outside the ken of any central authority and hence beyond any centralized control. The Invisible Man personifies everything Wells distrusts in the spontaneous order of the market. Griffin is the least predictable of human beings. He can appear anywhere at any time and throw a wrench into the working of the most elaborate government plan. He is indeed the bureaucrat's worst nightmare: how can you regulate a man if you cannot even see him?

Toward the end of the story, Griffin begins to behave like the arch-enemy of government authority, the terrorist. He hopes to undermine the power of the government by means of random acts of violence that will demonstrate its inability to assert its authority and maintain order. Thus *The Invisible Man* builds up to a confrontation that reveals

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Wells's vision of the well-ordered society. Faced with the threat of murderous violence from Griffin, the community finally organizes—into a huge manhunt from which even an invisible man cannot escape. Griffin has been a challenge to what Foucault and others call the panoptical character of government, its ability to see into every corner of society and thus to oversee all the activities of its citizens. With a nationwide dragnet, Wells's authorities will make sure that Griffin can no longer elude their surveillance:

> Every passenger train along the lines on a great parallelogram between Southampton, Winchester, Brighton, and Horsham, travelled with locked doors, and the goods traffic was almost entirely suspended. And in a great circle of twenty miles round Port Burdock, men armed with guns and bludgeons were presently setting out in groups of three and four, with dogs, to beat the roads and fields. Mounted policemen rode along the country lanes, stopping at every cottage.

Wells inadvertently shows his true colors here. This vision is profoundly totalitarian. Hostility to the Invisible Man easily passes over into hostility to ordinary commerce and indeed to the free and spontaneous movement of any individual.

The nationwide dragnet lays bare what has all too often been the nightmare result of the socialist dream: society turned into an armed camp, what Wells himself describes as a "state of siege." Nothing in the country is to move without the government knowing about it; all rights to privacy have been suspended. At a number of points earlier in the story, Griffin is protected by the traditional Anglo-Saxon regard for civil rights. Even when the authorities suspect him of having committed crimes, they punctiliously observe the procedures designed to protect the individual against unjustified government intrusion into his life, such as the requirement for search warrants. Initially contemplating cruel methods to snare Griffin, including "powdered glass" on the roads, the local police chief worries that these might be "unsportsmanlike." But by the end of the story, all sense of the individual's rights has been dissolved and the government conducts an all-out war against one of its citizens. Wells is able to make a case for the unique danger of an invisible man, but one may still be struck by the disproportion between the power of a solitary individual like Griffin and the vast forces mobilized to capture and destroy him. In the end, Wells shows the rebellious individual literally crushed by the weight of the community arrayed against him: what Wells calls "the pressure of the crowd."

At just the point when the Invisible Man threatens to elude the control of the authorities in England, he momentarily escapes Wells's control as a novelist as well. In chapter 26, Griffin finally becomes invisible even to his

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author. Up to this point, Wells has generally maintained the stance of an omniscient narrator, able to recount all the movements of his characters and even to give us access to their inmost thoughts. But suddenly he loses sight of his own creation:

> Thereafter for some hours the Invisible Man passed out of human perceptions. No one knows where he went nor what he did. But one can imagine him hurrying through the hot June forenoon, . . . and sheltering . . . amid the thickets of Hintondean. . . . That seems the most probable refuge for him. . . . One wonders what his state of mind may have been during that time, and what plans he devised. . . . At any rate he vanished from human ken about midday, and no living witness can tell what he did until about half-past two.

This is an odd moment in Wells's fiction. He is usually content to tell his stories in a straightforward manner, not troubling himself over issues of perspective or point of view. But here he calls attention to the fictionality of his story, and indeed throughout the rest of this chapter he presents himself uncharacteristically as a limited narrator who is forced to resort to rank speculation: "We can know nothing of the details of the encounter" or "But this is pure hypothesis." Wells seems uncomfortable with his new situation. For once he is not in total control of his story; he cannot supply the full explanation of the action in which he usually delights. Thanks to the elusiveness of the Invisible Man, Wells's own story threatens to become a mystery to him.

In this rare moment in his fiction, we get a glimpse of what unites H. G. Wells the novelist and H. G. Wells the socialist: both believe in central planning. As a writer, Wells was used to plotting his novels carefully so as to maintain strict control over their structure. Even among novelists, he is distinguished, at least in his early science fiction works, by the leanness of his plots, the fact that he generally excludes extraneous matter and keeps a tight focus on his thematic concerns. He almost never grants freedom to his characters. They exist only to carry out his plot and express his ideas. One reason Wells has not been a favorite among literary critics is that his novels strike many of them as thematically didactic and technically unsophisticated—which is another way of saying that he does not go in for the sort of modernist fiction that grants a certain autonomy to the characters and their points of view. The world of a Wells science fiction novel may be beset by chaos and cataclysms—dying suns, rebellious beast-men, invading Martians, giant insects run amok—but the book itself is always well ordered and clearly under the author's command.

This obsession with control seems to have carried over into Wells's attitude toward politics and economics. He expected society to be as

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orderly and centrally planned as one of his novels. As a novelist, Wells was always looking for closure, for the artfully plotted story that would take shape once and for all time. But in the free market, stories do not work out with the clear shape and neat outcomes of well-written novels. The market is always in flux, continually adapting to changing circumstances in the natural world and to the changing desires and attitudes of consumers. Hence Wells's dislike for the market. Like that of many artists, Wells's socialism has an aesthetic dimension. As a novelist, he had one model of order constantly in front of him: if a novel has a shape, the reason is that a single consciousness planned the work. Wells's aesthetic distaste for contingency prejudiced him against the spontaneous order of the market economy. He was used to the static perfection of a work of fiction, in which nothing is left to chance and the author takes responsibility for tying up all the loose ends before he reaches the conclusion. In speaking of his own temperament in *A Modern Utopia*, Wells describes how "the mere pleasure of completeness, of holding and controlling all the threads, possesses [him]." This ideal of control provides an excellent blueprint for fiction (a tautly plotted story) but a poor one for society (totalitarianism).

To understand Wells's hostility to the Invisible Man and the capitalist order he represents, we must return to his characterization of Griffin. In the Frankenstein tradition, Griffin is a portrait of the scientist as a young artist. Wells deliberately eliminates all the collaborative aspects of scientific research by presenting Griffin as a solitary creative genius, operating, like a Romantic artist, alone and on the fringes of society. As we have seen, Wells is highly critical of his Invisible Man, to the point of imaginatively siding with his enemies. And yet, like most authors, Wells cannot help sympathizing to some extent with his protagonist. Indeed, it would be odd if Wells, the visionary science fiction writer, did not in some way identify with Griffin, the scientific visionary.

Thus, in addition to providing a symbol of the capitalist order, the Invisible Man can be viewed as a self-portrait of Wells. Like his creator, Griffin is a man ahead of his time, so far ahead that the public fails to appreciate his genius. Griffin may thus give us a glimpse into his creator's dark side by revealing more than Wells intended about his own psychology. Griffin thinks of himself as a god among men—indeed, he plays that role to the servant he adopts, Thomas Marvel, who even addresses him as "Lord." Specifically, Griffin thinks of himself as a Nietzschean superman, raised above the conventional moral restraints that ordinary men feel compelled to observe. But at the same time, Griffin is a brilliant study of what Nietzsche calls *ressentiment*. In many ways, his invisibility scheme is an attempt to compensate for his deep feelings of inferiority, inadequacy, and powerlessness. Coming from humble origins, perpetually short of

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money, Griffin is a classic case of a man who tries to rise in the world by virtue of his wits; he wants desperately "to become famous at a blow." By his own account, he is jealous of other researchers and paranoid that they will steal and take credit for his discoveries. Griffin reveals himself to be obsessed with petty frustrations, chiefly the drudgery of his career as a teacher, surrounded by "gaping, silly students" and under constant pressure to publish or perish.

In short, Griffin feels woefully undervalued by society. He knows that he is more intelligent than the people around him, but many of them make more money or hold more honored positions. Society does not reward intelligence sufficiently to suit him. When he figures out how to become invisible, he is using his intelligence to obtain the rewards and privileges that society has been denying him. Griffin is out to prove something, as he tells the ignorant villagers of Iping: "'You don't understand,' he said, 'who I am or what I am. I'll show you. By Heaven! I'll show you.'" Griffin has a profound contempt for ordinary humanity, which he regards as well beneath him in the one quality he esteems: intelligence. That is why he is frustrated by the fact that an ordinary man like Marvel can interfere with his plans: "To have worked for years, to have planned and plotted, and then to get some fumbling purblind idiot messing across your course! Every conceivable sort of silly creature that has ever been created has been sent to cross me." Griffin's contempt for the stupidity of the common man means that he has contempt for the market economy and the way it distributes wealth. After all, it is the market economy that has denied Griffin the rewards he thinks he deserves. The principal use Griffin makes of his invisibility is to redistribute wealth, taking it away from the established owners of property and sending it in his own direction. To the extent that the Invisible Man seeks to undo the injustice of a market economy that in his view does not adequately reward merit, he may be said to be a socialist himself.

I have presented Wells's Invisible Man as at one moment a symbol of capitalism and at another a symbol of socialism: an obvious contradiction. But I believe that this contradiction lies in Wells's novel itself—that he portrays his central figure inconsistently. In many ways Wells was trying to give a portrait of the capitalist mentality in the figure of the Invisible Man, but he evidently invested too much of himself in his protagonist and ended up simultaneously portraying the mentality of a political visionary, a man who tries to remake the world to fit his image of a just social order. Indeed, at several points in the novel, the Invisible Man sounds a lot more like a radical revolutionary than like a capitalist businessman. He conceives the idea of a Reign of Terror to establish and consolidate his power: "Port Burdock is no longer under the Queen, . . . it is under me—the Terror! This is day one of year one of the new epoch,—the Epoch of the Invisible Man. I am Invisible Man the First."

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This is hardly the language of the free market. As Griffin's proclamation of a new era indicates, it is in fact the language of revolutionary totalitarianism.

Claiming to be able to spy into any corner of society and arrogating to himself the right to execute anyone he chooses, the Invisible Man becomes the mirror image of the panoptical, totalitarian regime arrayed against him. His model of order is not the free market but absolute monarchy. In proclaiming himself "Invisible Man the First," Griffin is only drawing the logical conclusion from his belief in his mental superiority. He is smarter than all other men, hence he ought to be able to rule them and order their lives. In his own way, the Invisible Man becomes a profoundly atavistic force, wanting to return England to its illiberal past, substituting one-man rule from above for any spontaneous ordering of market forces from below.

As a brilliant case study of *ressentiment*, Griffin provides remarkable insights into the psychology of the modern, alienated intellectual and his typically anti-capitalist mentality. In his feeling that the market economy treats him unjustly by insufficiently rewarding his talent and his genius, Griffin is indeed the prototype of the modern intellectual. This attitude helps explain why so many artists, scientists, academics, and other members of the intellectual and cultural elite have rejected capitalism and embraced socialism. They fantasize that a socialist order would undo the injustices of the market economy because, like Griffin, they secretly imagine that they will somehow be in charge of the centrally planned economy and thus able to redirect the flow of rewards as they see fit. Wells himself provides a perfect example of this mentality, and this may explain why he does such a good job of portraying Griffin. Like Griffin, Wells came from a humble background, spent time as a teacher, and used his wits (a good deal more successfully) to rise in the world and make himself famous. Moreover, despite his socialist leanings, Wells had a great deal of contempt for the common man and believed that society must be ruled from above, by an intellectual elite.

These attitudes surface prominently in *The Invisible Man.* We have already seen that although Wells ultimately sides with the villagers against Griffin, he presents them in a negative light, ridiculing their simple-mindedness. On their own, they would clearly be incapable of protecting themselves against a genius like Griffin. They would be doomed without the intervention of Dr. Kemp, the medical associate Griffin tries to enlist in his cause but who quickly turns against him. As Wells sets up the situation, one man of intellect is required to counteract the nefarious schemes of another man of intellect. Kemp shows his superior intelligence in the way he immediately sizes up Griffin and grasps the full extent of the threat an invisible man constitutes to England and human-

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ity. Moreover, it is Kemp, and Kemp alone, who comes up with all the plans for organizing society to capture Griffin.

Kemp's role in *The Invisible Man* reflects the peculiarly aristocratic form that socialism took in late-nineteenth-century England. Socialist doctrine offered a way of clamping down on all the productive forces that had been unleashed by free-market policies, forces that looked chaotic and anarchic to fastidious Englishmen like Wells and seemed to threaten the lingering ascendancy of cultural elites left over from the aristocratic past. Wells hoped to replace the old aristocracy of birth with a new aristocracy of talent, particularly intellectual and artistic talent, but his basic attitude remained aristocratic and anti-democratic nonetheless. One can detect in Wells a strong element of the socialist equivalent of noblesse oblige; his concern for the common man is mixed with a good deal of condescension, if not outright contempt. By virtue of his superior intellect and cultivation, Wells thought himself entitled to show Englishmen how they should live, how they should organize their social and economic existence. This is the peculiar Nietzscheanism of Wells's socialism. Like his contemporary, George Bernard Shaw, Wells managed to combine faith in socialist doctrine with the belief that only a kind of Nietzschean superman could successfully implement it. He believed that if society is to be saved, it cannot be by a collective effort, but only by the work of a single great man, or perhaps a band of great men, an elite brotherhood.

If, then, I have given a contradictory account of *The Invisible Man*, the reason is that a fundamental contradiction lies at the core of Wells's thinking. He upheld a socialist ideal of community, yet at the same time he saw a form of heroic individualism as the only way of bringing about socialism. Wells's vacillation between socialism and heroic individualism helps explain his conflicted portrayal of the Invisible Man and the basic incoherence of the Invisible Man as a symbol. But it is precisely this incoherence that makes *The Invisible Man* such a richly rewarding work to analyze. Wells may have set out to present a critique of capitalism, but in the process he ended up providing the materials for a critique of his own position and more generally of the artist-intellectual's predilection for socialism. Above all, Wells's portrait of the Invisible Man teaches us how contempt for the common man and contempt for the market economy actually go hand in hand. Wells's socialism is ultimately aesthetic and aristocratic in nature; it is rooted in nothing so much as his conviction of his superiority, as an artistic visionary, to the ordinary mass of humanity. Evidently, Griffin was not the only megalomaniac in town.

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Writers Afoot

Essayists as Infantry

EDWARD HOAGLAND

Essays are how we speak to one another in print—caroming thoughts not merely in order to convey a certain packet of information, but with a special edge or bounce of personal character in a kind of public letter. You multiply yourself as a writer, gaining height as though jumping on a trampoline, if you can catch the gist of what other people have also been feeling and clarify it for them. Classic essay subjects, like the flux of friendship, "On Greed," "On Religion," "On Vanity," or solitude, lying, self-sacrifice, can be major-league yet not require Bertrand Russell to handle them. A layman who has diligently looked into something, walking in the mosses of regret after the death of a parent, for instance, may acquire an intangible authority, even without being memorably angry or funny or possessing a beguiling equanimity. *He* cares; therefore, if he has tinkered enough with his words, we do too.

An essay is not a scientific document. It can be serendipitous or domestic, satire or testimony, tongue-in-cheek or a wail of grief. Mulched perhaps in its own contradictions, it promises no sure objectivity, just the condiment of opinion on a base of observation, and sometimes such leaps of illogic or superlogic that they may work a bit like magic realism in a novel: namely, to simulate the mind's own processes in a murky and incongruous world. More than being instructive, as a magazine article is, an essay has a slant, a seasoned personality behind it that ought to

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weather well. Even if we think the author is telling us the earth is flat, we might want to listen to him elaborate upon the fringes of his premise because the bristle of his narrative and what he's seen intrigue us. He has a cutting edge, yet balance too. A given body of information is going to be eclipsed, but what lives in art is spirit, not factuality, and we respond to Montaigne's human touch despite four centuries of technological and social change.

Montaigne's *Essais* predated by a quarter-century Cervantes's *Don Quixote,* which was probably the first novel. And the form of composition Montaigne gave a name to would not have lasted so long if it were not succinct, diverse, and supple, able to welcome ideas that are ahead of or behind the blurring spokes of their own time. But whereas a novelist is often a trapezist, vaulting from book to book, an essayist is afoot. Not a puppetmaster or ventriloquist, he will sound recognizable in his next appearance in print. There is a value to this, though Don Quixote as a figure outshines any essay. Imperishably appealing, he is an embodiment, not speculation, and we can simply call him to mind, much as we remember Conrad's Kurtz, in *Heart of Darkness,* and Dickens's Oliver Twist, although the regimes up the Congo River and in London aren't now the same.

An essayist's materials are drawn primarily from his or her own life, and he knits a skein of thoughts and impressions, not a made-up tale. An epic drama such as *King Lear* is thus not his province even to dream about. His work is humbler, and our expectations of him are less elastic than of novelists or poets and their creations. *They* can flame out in a flash fire, surreal or villainous, if the story is compelling or the language smacks a bit of genius. We accept different behavior from Céline or Genet, Christopher Smart or Ezra Pound, than from Dr. Johnson. Norman Mailer can stab his wife and William Burroughs can shoot his, and somehow we don't blanch. They "needed to," one hears it said. Their imaginations must have got the better of them. But if an essayist had done the same it would have queered his legacy. He is supposed to be the voice of reason. Though modestly chameleon as a monologuist (and however much he wants to recalibrate it), he is an advocate for civilization. He doesn't murder a foe in the street, like the sculptor Benvenuto Cellini, or get himself slain in a tavern brawl, like the playwright Christopher Marlowe, or gut-shot, like Pushkin, in a duel. A murderer or madwoman quarantined in a book on the bedside table can provide excitation and cautionary reading, but an essayist, being his own protagonist, should be faceted rather like a friend. We might give him our keys and put him up in the guest room. He won't be stealing the silverware and debauching the children, and, after sleeping on our problems, he will sit at the breakfast table in the morning sunshine and tell us what we ought to do. Or, at the outside, if—like the master essayist Charles Lamb—his

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sister has slaughtered his mother, he will devote the next thirty-odd years to piecing together a productive existence for himself and her, not despairing like an aficionado of the Absurd.

Essayists are not Dadaists, and in the endgame that may be in progress —with our splintering attention span, our hiccuping religions, staccato science, and spinning solipsism—they may prove useful. *Do* we human beings have a special spark of divinity? And if so, as we mince our habitat and compress ourselves into ever tighter spaces, having always claimed that there couldn't be too much of a good thing, how many of us *are* finally going to constitute a glut of divinity? Judeo-Christianity hasn't said. Nor did "the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God," which Thomas Jefferson invoked at the beginning of our Declaration of Independence. Or Emerson's rapturous prescription in *Nature* in 1836 (Emerson being the other founding father of essay writing in America) that an intelligent observer should become "a transparent eye-ball . . . part or particle of God," amid nature's ramifying glory. Now, man threatens to become a divinity doubled, redoubled, and berserk ad nauseam. However, the essay's brevity, transparency, and versatility should suit this age of reconsideration.

Essays are a limited genre because the writer will suggest that life is more than money, for example, without inventing Scrooge; that brownnosing demeans everybody, without the specter of Uriah Heep. Candide, Starbuck, Injun Joe, Moll Flanders, and Becky Sharp led lives more farfetched than an essayist's, whose medium is mostly what he can testify to having seen or read. Working in the present tense, with common sense his currency, "This is what I think," he tells the rest of us. And even if he speaks about alarming omens, we feel he'll be around tomorrow, not leap headlong into life and burn to a crisp at thirty-two or twenty-eight, like Hart Crane or Stephen Crane, or wind up forlorn in a railroad station fleeing his wife, as Tolstoy did when dying. The limitations are reassuring as well as tethering.

James Baldwin didn't metamorphose into an arsonist or a rifleman when he warned against race war in *The Fire Next Time.* And George Orwell deconstructed colonialism in essays considerably more nuanced than *Heart of Darkness*—supplementing though not supplanting Kurtz's immortal line, "The horror! The horror!" In a way, it's easier to visit a headwaters area of the Nile or Congo and find conditions not substantially improved since independence when you've read Orwell as well as Conrad on human nature, because these nuances prepare you better for disillusion. Conrad's picture was so stark, surely never again would the world see comparable scenes!

Ripples sway us—traffic tie-ups on a cloverleaf, on-line stock swings, revenge-of-the-rain-forest viral escapees—at the same time that our proud provincialism is called upon to bend the mind around Islam's surging

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claims, Latino vigor and disorder, chaos in Africa, and a Chinese-puzzle future. In a famine belt along the upper Nile, I've seen child-sized raw-dirt graves scattered everywhere beside a poignant web of paths of the sort that starving people pace. A scrap of shirt or broken toy was laid on top of each small mound to personalize the spot; and hundreds of bony, wobbling children who had survived so far ran toward me (a white-haired white man) to touch my hands in hopes that I might somehow be powerful enough to bring in shipments of food to save their lives. Their urgent smiles were giddy or delirious in skulls already outlined under tightened skin—though they were fatalistic, almost docile, too, because so many adults had told them for so many weeks that there was nothing to eat and so many people whom they knew had died. I interviewed the Sudanese guerrilla general who was in charge of protecting them about what could be done, but he was delayed a little that afternoon because (I found out later from an Amnesty International report) he had been torturing a colleague by pounding a nail through his foot.

Now, essayists in dealing with the present tense are stuck with the nuts and bolts of what's going on. And what do you say about that endgame on the Nile, which I believe was a forerunner, not an anomaly? I expect an epidemic of endgames, and disintegration in other forms. Essayists will become "journeymen," in a new definition for that hackneyed term: out on the rim, seeing what's in store. The cataract of memoirs being published currently may be a prelude to this—memoirs of a cascading endgame. Yet essayists are not nihilists as a rule. They look for context. They feel out traction. They have a stake in society's survival, breaking into the plot line of an anecdote to register a reservation about somebody's behavior, for instance, in a manner that most fiction writers would eschew, because an essayist's opinions are central, part of the very protein that he gives us. Not omniscient like a novelist, who can create a world he wants to work with, the essayist has the job of finding coherence in the world that we already have. This isn't harder, just a different task. And he usually comes to it in middle age, having acquired some ballast of experience and tested views—may indeed have written several novels, because of the higher glamour and freedom of that calling. (For what it's worth, I sold my first novel at twenty-one and wrote my first essay at thirty-five.)

"Art is not truth. Art is a lie that makes us realize truth," as Picasso said; and to capture within an imagined story some petal of human longing and defeat is an achievement irresistibly appealing. Essayists, by denying themselves that license to extravagantly fudge the facts of first-hand observation, relegate themselves to the Belles Lettres section of the bookstore, neither fiction nor journalism, because they *do* partly fudge their reportage, adding the spice of temperament and a lifetime's favorite reading. And if an enigma seems a jigsaw, they will tend to see a picture in it: that life therefore is not an oubliette. The fracases they get into are on

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behalf of democracy, as they see it (Montaigne, Orwell, and Baldwin again are examples), and their iconoclasm commonly leans toward the ideal of "comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable," which journalists used to aspire to. Like a short-story writer, an essayist is after the gist of life, not Balzacian documentation. And, like a soothsayer with a chicken's entrails, he will spread his innards out before us to discern a pattern. Not just confessional, however, a good essay is driven by the momentum of an inquiry, searching out a point, such as *are we divine?*—an awfully big one for the lowly essayist, but it may be the question of the coming century.

Essayists also go to the fights, or rub shoulders on the waterfront, get divorced ("Ouch," says the reader, "that was like mine"), nibble canapés, playing off their preconceptions of a celebrity or a politician against reality. They will examine a prejudice (is this piquant or ignoble, educated or soggy?) or dare a pie in the face for advancing an out-of-fashion idea. Or they may simply saunter, in Thoreau's famous reading of the word: *à la Sainte Terre,* to the Holy Land, or *sans terre,* at home everywhere —maybe only to the public library to browse among dead friends. Although a novelist can blaze along on impetuous obsessions and we will follow if Scheherazade has set her cap to catch us *(and then what happened?),* an essay is a current of thoughts corduroyed with sensory impressions, an author afoot, solo, with no movie sale in the offing or hefty hope of fame. Speaking his mind is likely to be a labor of love, and risky because if a work of fiction flops, at least it's nominally somebody else's persona that has been boring the reader.

A solo voice welling up from self-generating sources, or what Thoreau once called an "artesian" life, has not been the dominant mode of expression for the past half-century, so most of the best essays have had to find a home in magazines of lesser circulation, like *Harper's,* the *Village Voice, Outside, Yale Review,* or the *Hungry Mind Review.* The first-tier publications had corporate styles and personalities, each one insisting upon its editorial "we." But recently publishing has met with such a swirl of confusion that even flagship magazines have been losing money or grandiosity and wondering what tack to take. Essays are reappearing in unexpected places, in *National Geographic* as well as *The New Yorker,* and on the airwaves and in newspapers, as corrective colloquy or amusing "occasionals." Paralleling the flood of memoirs that are coming out, the essay form is in revival. And the two genres do overlap, though for essays a narrative is not an end in itself, as it can be in a memoir.

A sense of emergency, I suspect, is powering the popularity of memoirs, the urge for quicker answers than we get from reading novels: What's happening? How shall we live? Nature, which Jefferson and Emerson regarded as central to the health of society, is lately treated as a kind of dewclaw on our collective consciousness. This will, I think, begin

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to change in the face of ecological catastrophes, and essayists will be in on the action again—as they have attacked so many problems before, from slavery to political tyranny, in the struggle to preserve civilization from itself. (War is a "human disease," Montaigne said.)

The most civil of the literary arts, yet also a "book of the self," "spying on the self from close up," essays are versatile enough that in the same piece, "Of Experience," in which Montaigne says that "death mingles and fuses with our life throughout," he tells us that he can't make love standing up and speaks considerably about his kidneys, urination, and bodily "wind." Wholehearted, supple, an essayist over time may tell you everything you might want to know about him and stretch that measurement a bit, the way a friend or spouse or partner gradually does, until nothing about the living package of that person turns you off. If you know the anguish, joy, and bravery somebody has experienced, you can also share his episodes of shame and indigestion.

Like you, an essayist struggles with the here and now, the world we have, with sore and smelly feet and humiliation, a freethinker but not especially rich or pretty, and quite earthbound, though at his post. Like Thoreau later on (according to Emerson's report), Montaigne says that at a dinner party, "I make little choice at table, and attack the first and nearest thing." He is not much for show and affectation, but nonetheless he eats so zestfully he sometimes bites his own fingers. In a nutshell, maybe that is how to live. Eat of life with such brio that you're not afraid to bite your fingers.

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Immanuel's Ground

LIONEL BASNEY

When I was a boy, there was a camp meeting in my town. Since then it has become a Summer Family Conference and convenes in the facilities of the local college. But in those days it was a genuine holiness meeting, such as used to be common in American country places. The parents of those who came to the conference lived, then, in screened cottages and dormitories on the elm-roofed campground, where their parents had lived in tents with plank or straw floors, and used washstands beneath the trees. It was the middle generation I knew. They were a new population, in town every third week of July; the plates on their large secondhand cars read Ohio and Indiana and Florida. They held three services a day in the tabernacle, preaching and singing and praying. After supper, fanning themselves in the hot westering sun, they listened to missionaries describe the work in Africa, while the supper dishes clinked and someone whistled in the camp kitchen across the gravel drive.

I am writing of events forty years ago, in rural New York State, but these events represented something far older, as old almost as the national frontier once it had crossed the Appalachians. Camp meeting grew out of revivals flaring along southern rivers in 1799 and 1800, among people who, cheated on land and without a cultural fabric, made up a new culture on the spot. Two generations later, great vacation camp meetings, such as those at Ocean Grove and on Martha's Vineyard, were built by a Protestant hegemony setting out to reframe American life. Two generations after that, after war, boom, and the Scopes trial, the hege-

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mony had withered to an embattled minority trying to keep itself alive in the minds of its children. Ours was a small, obscure camp meeting. Few came, compared with the crowds on Martha's Vineyard, though our tabernacle was often full on Sunday nights. No one would come to argue with us, at least; no one bothered the cars in the stony parking lot, under the streetlight in its haze of insects.

The cottages on Martha's Vineyard, with their frilled eaves, have gone into American architectural history. Our tabernacle was just a roof of unplaned lumber above a concrete floor—closer, therefore, to its origins, the barn and the preaching-shed. I would distract myself from the sermon by tracking with my eyes the intricate raftering, the swing beams and purlins, the braces around the posts that held the roof up. Or tied it down. The design worked in the Gothic way, converting mass to suspension. The more wood that had gone into it, the lighter it had become. On stuffy evenings the ushers would slide the hangar doors open on both sides, leaving the roof seemingly without walls, floating on the uncertain air like a linen of rough pine. "I tell you . . . !" the preacher would shout, and above his voice, and above our singing, the tabernacle seemed to brood, impassively, with shadows under its wings.

The surrounding towns called ours "the holy city." It was officially dry, no hotel or bowling alley, its life dominated by the alliance of the college and the one big collegiate church. The town stood on plateaus let into the west wall of the river valley like balconies—one for the school, another above it for the campground, smaller ones, like lofts, for houses. To reach the campground, you wound up from balcony to balcony and finally bent a steep hairpin curve into the trees. The camp meeting hill was a kind of promontory over the long opening of the river, above the cornfields. Thrust out like a pulpit or castle keep, it was the first thing you saw of the town as you came from the north. You couldn't see the buildings, only the scrubby slope and the high battlement of trees. From among the trees, you couldn't see the valley.

Nor could you see the town, the college, or the lofts of houses. The campground was closed in. Eleven months of the year it was all but deserted. In summer, before and after the meeting, it was all but wild. Birds filled the trees and flung themselves through the air in front of you. Squirrels scrabbled tail up and tail down on the huge trunks and yelped back at the jays and crows, and at you, the intruder.

On the side of the tabernacle away from the road, weeds grew calf high right up to the cement sill. The grass was gray with dust that the rain huffed up from the clotted ground. Snakes lived there, sidling off as you walked out into the gravelly worn space, vaguely a drive, that curled around the tabernacle and separated it from cottages, dormitories, and kitchen. Even in front, the ground was raw and stony, the grass unmown. There were no monuments in the town square of this little

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temporary settlement. Its monument was itself—that it was just this, just here, that these were the circumstances of the repeated moment when people turned to face the reality they knew could not be negotiated.

When we think about religion, this is what we are looking for—the cultural traces, the formalities, of that encounter, so that by recording and understanding them we might come to understand the encounter itself. It had, for the plain people, the shape, the sounds, the smell of that grove and its wooden shed. You carried the meeting away with you when it was done, in memories of nights that were like the scars of home or of breaking away from home. Corners of the campground, or of the tabernacle itself, would go away in minds to the ends of the earth.

We walk up to the tabernacle in the hot late afternoon, after supper. The July sun has dulled the trees. The college lawns rust in the weeks of heat. Now the white light going orange lies like an abrasion on the tabernacle's matte-white walls. People are arriving from all directions. Their motion, the heated cars pulling up, the exhaust in the ballooning dust are not motion at all, but a property of the frozen heat and light. We live close enough to walk, across the scalded plain of the campus, onto a path as steep and narrow as an escalator trailing up the hill. None of this seems like motion either. Nothing seems to move. Everything is happening in the same moment. In the expectation of God.

The college falls away beneath us as we climb. The path peters out into a rutted, sandy patch of weeds and empties us into the grove. The grass, ropy as kelp, is rank with beaded, unripe ragweed and hoary dandelions. From the cottages and parking lot people assemble, the women with faces lowered into blossoms of shared gossip, the men carrying their jackets over their forearms. Children run and screech among the elms. There is a gush of organ music from the tabernacle. We walk deliberately toward it. I feel caught on a hook, my breath coming fast already.

Now the sun angles in from the deep west, and the white walls shine with light as sharp and flat as acid. Inside the tabernacle it is darker, stuffy. The wide doors are slid back on both sides, the air comes in, the tabernacle roof is airborne above us. The crowd stands with a grumble of chairs and feet; the organ punches the last phrase of a song everyone knows, in the quavery Hammond blat that is like batting in the ears; and we sing.

Around its edges the crowd is still frayed and gathering, people hurrying to places, the ushers walking quickly back up the aisles and signaling to each other to bring people down to empty seats in front. We sit down, the lath folding chairs crackling, and are welcomed. The presiding minister's smile seems to me rank pretense; but perhaps he is not afraid. I watch the line of ministers on the platform. They sing without songbooks, leaning over to speak with one another, nod and smile among themselves; their faces scan the crowd like searchlights. They join the song or

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leave it for a phrase, beating time on their knees with their Bibles.

They sit in a slight shadow. In the early evening the platform seems dim. All around us the tabernacle is ringed with windows and open doors. As the service begins, it is dark inside and the windows are full of daylight. As evening comes on, the windows grow clear, as if they were display cases in a museum of the real world: you can look out (in) on summer foliage, western New York, 1955. Then the lights are switched on and the room is ringed with darkness. The tabernacle gathers light into itself, holds it, until it is a ship blazing in the dark, the only survivor of the light. Late in the sermon the doors are still open, and the night outside is intense.

There is my family, sitting on folding chairs on the extreme western edge of the crowd, by a door. There I am, I can see myself; I seem composed, grave, but I can feel the terror behind the gravity in the child's round face. He is afraid of the approaching sermon and of what may come next, the call of God, the encounter.

With half his mind, however, he is listening to the crickets outside. He is holding to the world out there, making it real. Sometimes there is a sudden rise in the wind, whipping up dust and blowing through the wide doorway. The wind ruffles sheet music on the piano—the pianist grabs at the pages, smooths them back, rearranges her books—and in a hymnal lying open on an empty chair the pages flap and settle. No one but the boy seems to notice.

Sometimes there is rain. The air suddenly rouses and freshens, turns its cool lining outward, with the clamminess of the storm in its folds. There is a rush of wind, like the swell of an excited crowd, and the trees out of sight above the roof edge hiss and shush. Raindrops wash across the threshold like a scatter of grain and then begin to hammer steadily on the concrete. The roof bellows. In the myth time I am inhabiting, it seems inexplicable that the rain goes on regardless of the sermon. There is a voice in the storm. Which voice should I be listening to? There are two worlds, and I am sitting in both.

But the two worlds are most distinct and intense on perfectly still evenings, when the tabernacle is warmly yellow and the night seems to draw close to hear the preacher shout. The oldest sound outside, a sound so native to that northeastern summer as to be its natural form of silence, is the pulse of crickets. The preaching is an active sound, the crickets' sound contemplative. The preacher drives us toward decision, doing something, standing up, going forward. The sound outside leads you back to the summer evening—isolating, quieting, interiorizing, the song of a world that wants nothing, in which I could want nothing. At the moment, tormented by the preaching, I want that outside world with a desperate pathos. Even the passing of an occasional breeze raising its shallow applause among the trees does not disturb the stillness beyond the light.

Nothing moves. I sit in two worlds. This is myth time: summer, religion. The small enclosed grove, on the hill, is divided between light and dark. The portly women fan themselves, absorbed in the sermon. The

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evangelist wipes his neck. I can see myself, there, the grave dark face containing its terror and curiosity. The preacher is still calling to me; the evening is still at the door.

We leave the tabernacle and outside it is dark. "It was so dark," my mother writes me of the campgrounds of her childhood. "There were the little lights on tents here and there among the trees—but it was so dark." In the countryside, the city grid fifty miles away, we are in something like the actual darkness of the planet with the sun out of sight. Camp meeting stranded you in the night and gave you a little light to make it tolerable. It was like being stranded in time and having no more to go on than our small clearings of language. Camp meeting was in a clearing, too, the columnar trees stirring in their invisible tops. I doubt a plane would even have noticed us below—a few porch lights, the one streetlight in its steam of bugs.

The preaching, of course, appealed to brilliantly explosive light, fire falling from heaven (as it was said literally to have done during the Welsh revivals of 1905) and the light on the Damascus road. Our songs were wiser. "Let the lower lights be burning, / Send the news across the waves." Something about a hymn sung in our shopworn voices injected modesty into the project. "God has given me a lifeboat," D. L. Moody liked to say, "and told me, 'Moody, save all you can.'" The *Titanic* of Western culture was, after all, going down. It is a complex image, spiky. There is the triumphalism of watching what Hardy called "this vaingloriousness" disappear; there is also the tragic modesty of being able to do only a little. And the lifeboat lantern is hard to see past. It is so dark.

I have tried, but I can't recall the tabernacle lights being switched on. It must have happened. We felt the fall of dark. The light seemed not to vanish but to come inside, shrinking and brightening. Things narrowed and focused as the service went on, first to the pulpit, then to the altar rail, the point of energy and desire where people, kneeling, disappeared behind the people who were standing, and then in a minute voices would rise above the singing—"Glory! Hallelujah!" The dark outside served the purpose of the meeting; or, actually, the service had accommodated the gigantic event, the arrival of night, adapting itself in a triumph of cultural invention no less significant for being unconscious, simply accommodating the unavoidable: camp meeting was an outdoors phenomenon.

Culture is invented when circumstances are welded together with the widest intuition of their meanings. Religion can be had anywhere, any day, for a set fee, but faith is time- and place-specific. This is why the Bible says, *Now is the hour of salvation. . . . Now, if you will hearken. . . .* But there is also the observation, *You do not know the day or the hour. . . .* This makes the specificity of faith urgent. We must be, we were, endlessly accountable for what we did in a particular meeting on a particular night.

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Be watchful, therefore. Back we go to circumstances: the call is to presence and attention. The world is about to change around you.

At Cane Run, Kentucky, the Jerusalem of the camp meeting pentecost, you can enter the cramped log church that was standing on the ridge in August 1801, when the enormous "union meeting" began. The church is clean, restored, and quiet; its keepers have encased it in a stone basilica to keep the weather away. The revival itself, by contrast, was loud, out-of-doors, seismic, unpredictable. We can only guess how many people came, but they overwhelmed the preparations; the meeting expanded like a storm, or many overlapping tornadoes, and people a mile off could hear its heavy, abiding murmur, like the sound of a battle. While the meeting lasted, the rules of normal culture vanished. The little church has a slave balcony, but outside, slaves and masters marched side by side and women and children preached. From then on for a century, the signs of the American pentecost would be night and fire, forest and cleared place, marching, fainting, falling, and crying out, the midnight parade under flaring pine knots, the sacramental meal in a grove by a river.

Of course when the torches guttered and stank in the damp mosquito-thick dawn, things went back to normal. But what does it mean for things to be normal? More changed at Cane Run than styles of worship. Camp meetings were one source of abolitionist politics and so involved the causes of civil war. They involved its causes in a looser way: they were part of war's imaginative economy. Crossing over Jordan into campground, tenting there, the "hundred circling camps" with their altars and their "righteous sentence" read out in torch light: such images are not chosen or designed—rather, exuded, almost, from intense experience—but they made war plausible and therefore possible.

A new iconography is a new history: a set of conditions in which unprecedented things can be deliberately done. Any intensely religious event is an intensely worldly event. It remakes the world itself by affecting the meanings of the most comprehensive, least avoidable conditions. A religious event that does not change the meaning of light and dark, fire and water, food and drink, field and city, war and peace, birth and death, slavery and freedom has too superficial a connection with us. One that does can create culture.

Not a new mind, but a new world. Conversion changes the actual; things look and sound different. Different conduct, naturally, is required; people change their hopes and common practices. Cranmer's Third Collect for Evening Prayer—"Lighten our darkness we beseech thee"—does not say whether it is physical or spiritual darkness that is to be illumined. This is the prayer's great accuracy: what seems to be praying is the human condition, physical and imaginative at once. Cranmer's writing has the power of Shakespeare's. "The dark and vicious place where he thee got / Cost him his eyes," Edgar says of his father—not that Gloucester's punish-

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ment is proportionate, but that, having put himself in the line of darkness, he couldn't calculate or restrain the terrible darkness that might come. If Macbeth murders sleep, he will not sleep. Skeptics who mocked the camp-meeting exhorters for their ecstatic behavior were said to have been struck blind, suddenly groping and stumbling where they had been jumping and howling a moment before.

A circuit rider named Johnson is picking his way through the malarial Indiana woods at night. It is perhaps 1815. He and his horse blunder off the invisible track, slide twice into a ravine, and scramble out. He loses the horse altogether and stumbles on, falling into a river, and then, having recovered his mount, sits drenched and wretched in the utter lostness of the wilderness. The horse is half-asleep; it shifts and stamps. Johnson asks himself where he is. Immediately the answer comes, a hymn line—"We are marching through Immanuel's ground"—and he kicks the horse forward onto Immanuel's ground and is located, a few minutes later, by someone hearing him sing as he rides.

Indiana into Immanuel's ground: the conundrum lies in how it occurs. But then what do we know about religion? We have hardly advanced beyond William James: "If you ask *how* religion thus falls on the thorns and faces death, and in the very act annuls annihilation, I cannot explain the matter, for it is religion's secret, and to understand it, you must yourself have been a religious man of the extremer sort." Setting the condescension aside, James has two important things right: it is the "extremer" case—the genuine believer—who provides the crucial data; and the religious do understand.

But that will not be enough to say, and the condescension cannot be set aside. There are two languages here, two resources of explanation, and James will accept only one of them, that of science. The religious understand, but not in a language James can hear. The gap is as wide as the coming of secular culture, as sharp as the mind-body problem; it is the abyss Kierkegaard insisted on to renew the urgency of faith. Religion can be had anywhere, for a set fee, but it does not correspond to, it only accompanies, the "secret." "For it is in ritual," Clifford Geertz wrote, "—that is, in consecrated behavior—that the conviction that religious concepts are veridical and that religious directives are sound is somehow generated." Somehow: there is always this stop in the argument. It stops at the division of languages, at the tabernacle door, watching the people streaming forward and not knowing what to say.

"There is no criterion," Paul Tillich wrote, "by which faith can be judged from the outside." The question of whether "religious concepts are veridical" will have to be asked by the faithful themselves, who "can say," Tillich went on, ". . . whether the medium through which [they experience] ultimate concern expresses real ultimacy." Then Tillich vacil-

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lated: or someone else can say. But how? The truth is that religious believers are always asking themselves this question, though not in Tillich's language, and that if there is a subjective answer in devotion, the objective evidence is the persistence of the community that believes.

For it is finally a matter of how belief is born in the new believer. That it occurs is plain; how it occurs may be told, and the narratives can, within a given community, be formalized, but finally we will have no evidence but the narrative. *I once was lost, but now am found.* Found where? In the place that faith has changed. In that place you meet others whose stories may be radically different from yours; but all of you recognize the place. In the tabernacle most of the young people eventually yielded to the magnetism of the altar and stepped, or were carried, across the threshold. Others went away, up the aisle, hostile and embittered. Their narrative was often political: the service was an exercise of unrationalized authority, an imposition. But they had misread the event; it had shrunk to the size of the preacher's mouth. They had lost track of most of the facts—the singing, the yellow light, the concrete floor so cold through the strip of carpet, the grove outside, where it was so dark. That wasn't where they wanted to be found.

In both worlds it is getting late. The sweetness of the grove rides in the open door on an occasional puff of cool wind. Inside the tabernacle it is warm, almost hot, in the yellow light, and the air has its own stuffy sweetness—perfume, hymnal paper, the dusty plushiness of the old seats. The sermon is almost done. Now it is done, and the altar call begins. If the altar is not barren, as we say, many will kneel there, and your private prayer will be buoyed, or will have to struggle, on the tide of many public ones.

How they swarm up out of my memory, the voices of those altar calls: "Come home!" the melody rises like a question, "come home," the question is answered by deeper voices in harmony, "come home!" the melody sweeps back down and then begins a stepwise climb, "Ye who are weary, come home!" Then the calmer prose—"Softly and tenderly, Jesus is calling. . . ."

When we get to the high note, the minister is waiting for us. It has been all the verses and four choruses, and the aisles are full of people slipping out and going forward in a broken stream, but the minister knows there are more to be persuaded. He has been beating time with his Bible in both hands, not singing, but seeming to soak up the music, to become charged with its electricity, and now as we climb to the song's highest pitch, he calls out, "Softly and tenderly," and then we sing, back and forth, "Softly and tenderly," "Jesus is calling," "Jesus is calling," and when we near the end of the chorus, he says to the song leader, always the attentive lieutenant at his right shoulder, "Brother Mitchell, could we sing just one more verse?" And we do.

All around me the song whelms. I am standing on an inside aisle,

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sharing a songbook and singing in a choked, subdued voice. I study the ridges and pits and welts in the concrete floor, just feet away. My heart is yanking in my chest like a trigger; I am trembling and cannot move.

Now the minister stops the singing. He tells us how it will be with him in an hour, after the service is done and the last opportunity is gone, when he kneels in his room and the Lord asks him, "Roy, did you give it to them straight?" He is making us responsible for the agony of self-examination he will have to endure. Eventually he comes to the inescapable, mythical story about the young person who resisted the call and that very night, going home from the meeting, was killed by a tractor trailer, trampled into eternity by the screaming tires. The effect of the story is to make you afraid to step out of the tabernacle; but the child had been afraid to come in. There is, he sees, no escaping; now is the day, the hour, the moment.

There is a woman kneeling at the altar not far from the child. She is a regular, the wife of a minister—a small, energetic, kittenish woman who wears bolero skirts and, instead of braiding her hair and hiding it, lets it cascade, black and prematurely graying and full of ringlets, down her back. She kneels beside her husband, a strikingly handsome man. We know why they are there. They do not need the grace of the altar themselves, though they would not say so; they are praying for others. But her concern has an edge. She is full of spontaneous resentment—she would probably call it righteous anger—against those who would challenge her place in her understanding of things. She is a small, delicate person, but I cannot remember ever seeing her smile. And now, somehow, she lifts her head and turns from the altar rail to look straight at me. The look—which I remember now, forty years later, with perfect lucidity, as if she were looking straight through time—is as flat and cruel as a lynx's stare.

I do not go to the altar—I cannot move—and eventually the meeting ends. I am still afraid but at the same time intensely relieved, as if after months of testing and suspense I have been told that I have a fatal illness and nothing can be done, and I can set about reconciling myself to it. We are near the door and slip out into the darkness throbbing with crickets. The two worlds resolve into one. But it feels flat, one-dimensional. I have lost something.

So the account ends there. The innocent, vacant self is compelled, or required at least, to buckle to the unintelligible, authoritarian demand.

I have told that story to fine, liberal-minded religious people, and they have been shocked. "How did you survive?" The question shows a misunderstanding, though, and in a modern way, by assuming that the self is self-ordaining and that any contribution to its options that is larger than the self is an imposition and therefore a cruelty. But this is not the meaning of the experience.

The question is, have you met whatever you take to be non-nego-

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tiable—God, the divine, death, the ultimate ground of being—and held the encounter until the other declared its name? "Those who are awakened to the light," Tillich wrote, "ask passionately the question of ultimate reality. They are different from those who do not." The awakening and then the question. Whatever interior movement it is that occurs in conversion, that small, deeply cut turning of a corner, it is a moment when one has no choice and one's choice is free.

Other nights, other moments. We are singing, many have gone forward, the altar is not barren. Then one of the seekers stands and walks back up the aisle toward me. He passes my right shoulder, and, as he does, he looks me in the face and smiles.

I know him slightly. He is someone caught up and bewildered by religion, someone who lacks the emotional sturdiness, perhaps, to stand in the beating of that relentless surf. He is odd. He buttonholes people on Wednesday mornings and demands, "Is there an angel in that tree? *Right there.* Do you believe that?" Angels are as palpable to him as bathtubs.

Anyhow, he passes me and smiles. Something happens to me, more in my face than in my mind. "You were radiant," my girlfriend says. She also is one of us and knows what it means. It is an evidence, a mark in the flesh.

Another service. The sermon ends, the singing begins. An elderly man, dressed in the flat brown gabardine typical of fifties Sunday best, steps out of his row. But he doesn't go to the altar. Instead he stands in the aisle, facing the front, and then raises his right hand above his head. He says nothing, doesn't sing, gesticulate, or look around. But the aisles are suddenly thronged.

Of course he may be a plant, a charlatan, one more device. But the more likely possibility is that he has absorbed the power of that gesture, distilled and intensified, from a lifetime of such services. He has raised Moses' hand above the Red Sea. He might even say it that way. It is like the gesture of a great actress who has moved all her life in the literature of her roles, and no longer invents anything, but moves with the authority of her whole community and tradition.

In any case, it is a manifestation. What was hidden has been shouted from the rooftop. That conductivity of looks and gestures, that radiance passed from face to face as a flame is dipped out of one candle by another, is the unofficial sacrament of the whole enterprise.

I remember wandering past the east wall of the tabernacle one evening and finding, to my surprise, that the door was unlocked. I hauled it barely open on its grating track and edged through. It was late summer, the sun was already down, and while under the trees the air was still light, inside it was dim. The hundreds of seats overlapped up the gentle rake of the floor like the ghosts of shells. I sighed harshly, too deeply, I don't know why. Or I do. I had been afraid here—not the needle panic at human violence, but the larger fear that makes the floor shake and your

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tongue cleave to the roof of your mouth. The tabernacle's air was sweet with the smell of dusty hymnbook paper. There was something in it, though, of Ezekiel's salt-waste valley where the bones stood up. I walked to the center of the altar rail and knelt. But the people had gone for the season, the meeting had left with them, and the tabernacle was silent at my back.

Where does the power of the religious claim come from? *From something having happened.* The event is the source and the subject of ritual. Yet we can idolize events. "What did you come out to see?" Jesus asked the crowd, with his familiar unsettling irony. "A reed shaken by the wind?" They were expecting too little: a newsworthy occurrence, one more in a series, trivial no matter what—not a change of world. What happened to me was a long cumulative event, a location, an opening. I knew the tabernacle for what it was—a tent in the wilderness, a *sukkah,* the proper home for a journey, for a setting-out-one-knows-not-where, for confidence in things summoned by hope.

This is perhaps the place to say that I am a Christian. If you take as a rule James's divergence of languages, you will find it hard to imagine that the camp meeting carried me beyond its terrors, that I learned—I am indebted to the lynx for this—that I was dealing not with one tainted mind but with ultimate concern. The truth is that I never wholly belonged to the camp-meeting people and cannot easily say why. But I had been enclosed, very young, in very old circumstances—the tabernacle and the wilderness. The believer learns to sit in two worlds at once. What a training for a writer!

And fear had its place in this, along with radiance and longing. "Thanks to its tenderness, its joys and fears," Wordsworth wrote of the heart—and the heart must have places to be afraid in, as Wordsworth knew, and to acknowledge that the fear is not petty or vestigial but called for and warranted. We must know when and how to acknowledge, in the company of others, that our explanations, our myths, and our practical uses for things thin out quite close to us, and that then we must simply wait for meanings that come to us from outside.

We stood, sang, knelt, prayed in the tabernacle on late July nights and waited there together. In their prayer caps and wide, garish ties, these people had made a cultural triumph by paying attention first of all to other things. They had built according to an ideal of plainness—light, dark, the wooden roof, the grove. What the plainness meant was: the intention to *be plain,* with yourself and others; directness of purpose; the long establishment of languages in which spiritual things could be spoken of directly, plainly, in which spiritual business could be done. I would go back and sit there again, if I could—if the tabernacle had not been torn down and the people gone elsewhere—and absorb the preacher's words, the songs, watch the night and the rain wait on the threshold, smell the dense unflowered sweetness of the northern woods. I know that place for what it was: Immanuel's ground.

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THE UNCERTAIN ART

Pumping Iron

SHERWIN B. NULAND

The Roman satirist Juvenal counseled his readers that the labors of Hercules are to be preferred to soft cushions and great feasts. One should pray for *mens sana in corpore sano,* he advised, rather than for a life of indolence. A millennium and a half later, John Locke appropriated that aphorism, "A sound mind in a sound body," in his celebrated *Some Thoughts Concerning Education,* and since then it has been a proclaimed theme for nearly every generation of teachers.

But like youth, which we all agree should not be wasted on the young, the admonition of the poet and the philosopher needs to be snatched up by people of all ages. Those of us who are getting on in years, in particular, should snatch it up and run with it—literally. In recent years, study after study has shown that exercise of mind and body is the key not only to what Locke called "a happy state in this world" but to increased longevity and prolonged independence. Readers of daily newspapers have seen the reports of leading research groups confirming that vigorous activity in middle-aged or older people prevents or at least significantly lessens loss of muscle strength, which is responsible for so much disability and even disease.

As for intellectual capacity, it is by now well known that the best way to maintain mental function is to exercise it. Or, as Oliver Wendell Holmes famously put it, "Men do not quit playing because they grow old; they grow old because they quit playing." This is as true for brain and nerve as it is for bone and muscle. The proficiency of the synapse, where an impulse is transmitted from one nerve cell to another, is strengthened by frequent use. It retains its capacity to change, even to become more effective, throughout life.

Recent studies hint at the possibility that this may also be true of the nerve cells themselves. Their ability to generate impulses—what neuroscientists call "electrogenicity"—appears to respond to changes in input. The electrogenic machinery can apparently be remodeled, and patterns of electrical activity altered, depending on the kind and frequency of stimuli that reach the cell. So keep reading. You may be strengthening your synapses and building your electrogenicity.

All this sophisticated talk adds up to no more than the advice so often proclaimed by that syndicated sage Ann Landers: "Use it or lose it." And it certainly confirms everyone's daily observations. Simply put, active people remain active. Though it is comforting to have it confirmed by Landers, by laboratories, and by the learned, we have all known for a very long time that the key to productivity is productivity.

What we have not known are the details. At first gradually, and now with increasing velocity, not only scientists but fitness experts too are learning the specifics of just what is required to preserve ourselves—if not necessarily to a greater age, at least to one less encumbered by the debilities that too often characterize the final years of life. Even should "using it" not succeed in prolonging our days, vigorous activity of mind and muscle is the secret of better aging, or what the gerontologists call "compression of morbidity." By this they mean the goal of so decreasing the frequency of sickness and disability in the elderly that their period of decline is much shortened. The long-range goal is to make the graph of the approach to life's termination resemble a horizontal line followed by a more or less perpendicular drop-off rather than a gradually

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downward-sloping curve to the grave, even if the date of the endpoint proves to be unchangeable.

And as for that endpoint date, there is, of course, abundant evidence, both anecdotal and statistical, of the beneficial effect of exercise on life expectancy, and it has been accumulating for a long time. Readers of this publication might find one recently reported study of particular interest because it deals with a cohort of subjects very much like the sort many of us hang around with. A long-term evaluation of fifty-two thousand male graduates of Harvard College and the University of Pennsylvania has shown that alumni between the ages of thirty-five and seventy-four who over the years expended at least two thousand calories per week in vigorous activities had a risk of cardiovascular disease and death that was 25 percent lower than that of less active men. Not only that, but men who took up an active life long after college did better than former student athletes who had quit in middle age. Couch potatoes should note the jock-image titles of both the article and the professional publication in which it was printed: "A Natural History of Athleticism, Health and Longevity," in the *Journal of the Sports Sciences.*

Though the link between exercise and longevity may not be news, only recently has loss of muscle strength been recognized as a major element in causing the disabilities that overtake us as we get older. The greater the age, the greater the contribution of frailty, until it—and not any named disease—becomes the single most important determinant of quality of life. In a paper published in *Science* in October 1997, a team of Dutch researchers reported that their studies had convinced them that "in the oldest old [those over eighty-five], loss of muscle strength resulting in frailty is the limiting factor for an individual's chances of living an independent life until death." In study after study, they and others have demonstrated that feebleness in the elderly not only is preventable but, with an appropriate exercise program, can actually be reversed.

In a report now frequently quoted, researchers at Tufts University were able to increase the leg muscle strength of a group of ten frail men and women between the ages of eighty-six and ninety by an average of 174 percent. This was accomplished in a period of eight weeks through a regimen of supervised, high-intensity weight training. Although all of these old folks had chronic diseases or disabilities, none of them sustained any injuries as a result of the exercises. Their balance improved; so did their walking speed. In the nine years since the Tufts group published its results, many confirmatory reports have appeared. Among the surprising findings has been how rapidly the benefits of resistance training with weights become apparent, both by measurements and by improvement in activity.

If you're middle-aged or younger and have read this far, you may be wondering what all of this has to do with you, at least for now. Well, plenty.

Even in our twenties, our ability to manufacture the protein so essential to maintaining muscle begins to lessen. At the same time, fat mass starts to go up and bone density starts to decrease. Though the changes are minimal at first, they speed up after about age thirty, when CT scans actually show evidence of the falling off, such as decreased muscular density and narrower cross-sectional dimensions in the thigh, as well as increasing amounts of fat within individual muscles. Once we reach age fifty, our tendency to dwindle really takes off. Between then and seventy, as much as 30 percent of our strength will be lost, and the process of turning into a little old scarecrow probably doubles in speed. As if all of this were not enough, less muscle and its inevitable result—less activity—mean less stress on the bones, which in turn become less dense and more prone to osteoporosis.

And so, though loss of muscle strength is the limiting factor for the independence of the oldest old, it quite obviously can have profound effects for the rest of us, too, and much earlier than most people have realized. But cheer up. As the fitness experts tell us, studies that began with the oldest of the old have produced the newest of the news: such deterioration does not necessarily have to take place. The answer, as has only recently been discovered, is anaerobic exercise—activity in which the body incurs an oxygen debt. Aerobics—jogging, running on treadmills, pedaling real or stationary bikes, and the like—may do won-

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ders for the heart and lungs, but to ward off feebleness and its associated debility, nothing replaces resistance training with weights. So impressed has the American College of Sports Medicine been by the demonstrable benefits of resistance exercises that it has, within the past year, begun to recommend weight training for men and women over the age of fifty.

Weight training has yet another advantage over aerobic exercise: it uses at least five times as many calories as activities like walking, running, or swimming. The reason is that heavy exercise breaks down muscle fibers, whose rebuilding by the body's natural reparative processes burns up lots of energy. On top of that, every pound of new muscle requires thirty to forty calories per day just to maintain it, even when it is at complete rest. So it behooves us all, young or old, to hie ourselves to the nearest gym.

Lest you think I am one of those above-it-all types who dish out advice and don't take it, I present here my own personal experience in using the new knowledge. But first I must point out that I did not go gently. For those unconvinced, reluctant, undecided, or indecisive readers—who, in spite of being much impressed with the findings presented in the foregoing paragraphs, are nevertheless shuffling their feet or thinking, "It's all very well and good for you, Mac, but . . . "—well, I will simply say that I was only recently among your number. But I am now a convert, and like so many converts I am much more than a convert; I am a zealot. Permit me, gentle reader, to explain why I now haul my sixty-eight-year-old body off to the gym three times a week, and there cavort among the fit.

No one—but especially no one as predisposed to vanity as a surgeon—likes to be asked by his eldest son, "Hey Pops, wouldn't you like to get some tennis shorts that are a little longer, now that your quads aren't what they used to be?" Coming hard on the heels of a longtime tennis partner's across-the-net observation that "our legs are starting to look as if they belong on a couple of scrawny chickens," the thirty-something's well-intentioned advice was more than a little demoralizing. I decided then and there that the time had come to pay attention to the repeated urgings (truth to tell, they were more like hectorings) of my wife, who had been looking svelter by the day as the result of rising at five o'clock each morning to pump iron and run stationary laps at a local gym.

Within days, I had signed up for an exercise program at a facility a few miles from my home called—what else?—the In Shape Fitness Center. Being committed to the principle that all novitiates need a role model, I found myself a deceptively sweet-natured Atlas of a trainer named Dave Butler and told him that I wanted to be just like him when I grew up. Graciously ignoring the obvious fact that I'm thirty-five years older than he, my new mentor took me at my word. Aware that it was far too late to acquire a sweet nature, I nevertheless did harbor an aging male's fantasy about emulating Dave's strength. But first, my immediate goal was to get the old legs back and flatten a gut that was just beginning to make itself evident.

Dave took a long list of measurements, made a series of calculations, and set up a program of resistance training and cardiovascular exercise. It wasn't a menu for the faint of heart, and in spite of his gentle demeanor, Dave proved to be a young man of forceful determination, setting me loose in the gym with the admonition that he expected real improvement by the time I was rechecked in six weeks.

In matters like these, it helps to have a compulsive personality, and that's where the three decades in the operating room paid off. I have been religious about my exercise routine, which I labor through at least twice and often three times a week, always on my own. What do I care that just about every other male in the place is in his twenties or thirties and is pumping as much as twice the iron that I pump? And why be concerned that more than once I have followed a nineteen-year-old coed onto a machine and had to remove twenty or thirty pounds from the weight pile before lifting? The reward came when Dave did that second set of calculations, and then a third as I was preparing to write this column.

First, the numbers. In eight months of sweating and straining, I have taken off nine pounds of fat and added six pounds of muscle mass. My waist is two inches narrower and my chest an inch and a half wider. The percentage of my body that is fat has dropped from twenty-one (in the range called "acceptable"

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on the fitness charts) to sixteen (in the middle of the category designated as "fit/healthy"). These improvements have come about without an iota's change in my eating habits, although Dave originally outlined a nutrition plan that I have gleefully ignored. And all of this in spite of my traveling schedule. Since I started at the gym, work has often taken me away from home, and there was one period of at least six weeks when I went through the workout no more than a total of four times. And yet, I am, in fact, In Shape. I can now run around the tennis court as I haven't since my thirties—or perhaps my twenties. I can't wait for my solicitous son to visit, so I can put on (short) bathing trunks, take him to a pool, and show off my (believe it or not) sculpted chest and abdominal muscles, which I have taken to calling pecs and abs. An unexpected dividend has been that almost all of the little muscular aches and pains that we senior citizens force ourselves to get used to have disappeared.

But there have been a couple of disappointments. It is claimed that consistent strenuous exercise lowers cholesterol. After a small initial drop, mine has gone right back up to its previous high, and I expect it to stay there. And then there's the testosterone story. I've read reports that its concentration rises with anaerobic exertion, and mine did in fact shoot up to a stratospheric level at the four-month mark and has gone even higher since then. With testosterone like that, I should have been bounding around like a satyr chasing nymphs. When I noticed no change, I queried a friend who specializes in knowing a thing or two about hormones. He gently broke the sad news that heavy exercise increases the secretion of a protein that binds testosterone, which is why its blood level rises. But a bound testosterone molecule is like a bound stallion—it can't run with the herd. It's the *free* testosterone that does the job, and mine has gone up less than ten percent. But I'm not complaining, and the nymphs are safe.

As for those chicken legs—well, I expect my tennis partner to sign himself up at a gym any day now. At seventy-one, he's three years older than I, but we both know it's far from too late. And now, so do you.

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JOURNAL

New York Notebooks

MARK O'DONNELL

A great new phrase to enter the vocabulary in the wake of computerized subway admission cards that misfire: PLEASE SWIPE AGAIN. (Encouraging thievery, it would seem.)

The last thing maids at the Waldorf do when cleaning the room is to back out, using a broom, to erase their own footprints on the carpet.

Vague, uncommitted possible dates: The Social Life of Damocles.

One-night stand: two champagne glasses; one coffee cup.

Stage Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking scene with a second Lady Macbeth following behind her, and then a slow pileup of actresses, till there are twenty Lady Macbeths onstage, all murmuring the same monologue, in staggered cadences, for a cacophonous finale. Expressive of universal guilt, or just surreal spectacle? *(Performance time: six minutes.)*

The dimpled bottoms of plastic cola and seltzer bottles resemble the base of Delicious apples.

An orange peeled in one piece, like a Mercator projection map of the world.

A child on the phone, when I thought I'd dialed suburban friends: "You have the wrong number, and—they're not here right now."

Odd dream: My HMO has changed again. I have to bicycle to Brooklyn or the Bronx. In the rear of a run-down four-family house, I find two doctors: one who makes microscopic prescription glasses, and the other who shrinks patients down to microscopic size so they can *wear* those glasses.

Shallow teen girl: "Shakespeare? Ugly and bald. Einstein? Ugly and bad hair. Sir Isaac Newton? Kinda ugly and a wig."

How lyrical, the ocean's levels:
euphotic—0–600 feet down: "good light"
mesopelagic—600–3,200 feet: "middle zone"
bathypelagic—to 20,000 feet: "deep ocean"
abyssopelagic zone—20,000–35,000 feet
hadal zone—beneath the ocean floor: hell

Instead of old-fashioned names like Faith and Chastity, how about new ones like Solvency and Credibility? "This is my son, Hype."

Deliberately lame comedy is useless; it's second-rate minds mocking third-rate minds.

Imaginary philosophical schools:
The Denialists: "*What* universe?"
The Apathists: "Who cares why?"
The Acquisitionists: "Why isn't it bigger?"

As titles:
Spilled Milk
All the Livelong Day
Born Single

A WASP named Tenterhook ("of the Providence Tenterhooks"). A family therapist named Kinsolver.

The infinitive: what an impressive verb tense!

Mark O'Donnell, the author of the novels *Getting Over Homer* and *Let Nothing You Dismay*, has taught writing at Yale and translated Molière and Feydeau. He draws material for his writing and teaching from the notebooks he has kept since the eighth grade.

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Midnight and noon: the only seconds of the day that are so charged they have their own names.

Threatening to be undecided: "I have half a mind to be of two minds about this."

You can mock the groom in wedding-reception toasts, but it would horrify the crowd if you mocked the bride.

Capital punishment's dilemma: *Is he sane enough for us to kill him?*

Translating is like converting currency—you have to be able to spend it in the new country.

When two people argue in a play, the playwright must agree with both of them.

Calm voice-over in drama: "Autumn came, and Winter. And then Spring again. And then, strangely, not Summer. It went directly to Autumn, and then Winter again, and Winter *again,* twice in a row, which was odd, and then Spring . . ."

A man so lazy he's stranded on an escalator during a power failure.

A workaholic eventually finds his office away from office.

That odd silence at the start of a social evening, when the group assembled in a restaurant examines a menu. A doldrum, so soon!

That edgy sublimity of a beautiful sunset as viewed from a roller-coaster car on the cable-haul up the first hill.

Skinny Men, Fat Women: A History of Community Theater

I love the impossible way supervillains in pulp tales know they're evil and talk about it. No real villain ever considered himself anything but justified.

The haves and have-nots: Standard & Poor as opposed to simply standard and poor.

As title: *The Devil Gets Paid*

Misheard: "I'm in health prevention."

Genres to discuss in comedy-writing class:

1) CONFUSION & MISTAKEN IDENTITY. We know something they don't know. The duchess mistaken for a maid, the bum for a millionaire. *The Comedy of Errors, She Stoops to Conquer, A Flea in Her Ear, The Inspector General.*

2) RIDICULOUS AMBITION. Greed and competition among morons and midgets. Napoleon, Barry Diller, *Yertle the Turtle, Gulliver's Travels,* any game show, the Oscars.

How about an award for *Best, Considering?*

Fiction: I put my emotional gasoline into an imaginary car.

Avoiding novel for other writing: playing hooky only to sneak into another school.

Notebook entries: embryos or mummies?

PR: No sooner done than said.

Zen truth: When you're not wearing your glasses, it's harder to find your glasses.

The anxious clerk standing in the shop doorway frightens prospective shoppers away.

Friends come to the housewarming; close friends help you move.

As a kid, I conjectured about the city of "airplane hangars" behind the Warner Brothers TV logo; the obscure megalopolis at the foot of the Twentieth Century Fox emblem; the curious diaphanous astral hula hoops surrounding the Earth in Universal Pictures.

If success is the Bitch Goddess, happiness is the Missing Nice Doggie Goddess.

The Years

Sow, reap, eat.
Repeat.
Sow, reap, eat.
And so repeat.
Bitter or sweet,
Repeat, repeat.

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- **D** **Carlos Castaneda:** *Don Juan: The Sorcerer* (38 min.)
- **E** **Noam Chomsky:** *Government in the Future* (57 min.)
- **F** **Winston Churchill:** *We Wait Undismayed the Pending Assault* (20 min.)
- **G** **Edward De Bono:** *How to Change Ideas* (55 min.)
- **H** **Margaret Mead:** *How People Change* (25 min.)
- **I** **Robert Frost:** *An Evening with Robert Frost* (55 min.)
- **J** **Buckminster Fuller:** *Twentieth-Century Renaissance* (55 min.)
- **K** **Albert Schweitzer:** *On Goethe (trans. by Thornton Wilder)* (80 min.)
- **L** **G. Wilson Knight:** *Shakespeare and the English Language* (30 min.)
- **M** **Groucho Marx:** *Fast Mind, Faster Mouth* (60 min.)
- **N** **Joseph Mazzeo:** *Machiavelli: Practical Politician or Devil?* (50 min.)
- **O** **Ashley Montagu:** *The Nature of Human Nature* (48 min.)
- **P** **Edwin Newman:** *Decline and Fall of American Language* (55 min.)
- **Q** **J. Robert Oppenheimer:** *Relevance of Literature to Science* (19 min.)
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- **S** **Arnold Toynbee:** *The Ancient Mediterranean View of Man* (24 min.)
- **T** **Viktor E. Frankl:** *What Is Meant by Meaning* (33 min.)
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• BOOKS •

REREADING

Marginal Notes on *Franny and Zooey*

DAVID SAMUELS

No one becomes a reader except in answer to some baffling inner necessity, of the kind that leads people to turn cartwheels outside the 7-Eleven, jump headlong through a plate-glass window, join the circus, or buy a low-end foreign car when the nearest appropriate auto-repair shop is fifty miles away. With these dramatic examples fresh in your mind, you'll probably require only a small amount of additional convincing that my little theory—based on years of painful experience—is true. Reading requires a loner's temperament, a high tolerance for silence, and an unhealthy preference for the company of people who are imaginary or dead.

It also requires patience, or what my high school gym teacher, whose name I remember as Randy Fisk, or Fist—a bantamweight Irishman with a ginger mustache, who exhibited a suspicious delight in watching his fourteen-year-old charges vault a padded "horse"—used to call "good old-fashioned stick-to-it-iveness." His opinion was that readers were pale unnatural freaks with a built-in resistance to normal physical exercise. And because, like so many freaks, I have a desperate desire to appear normal, it pains me to admit that Mr. Fist, or Fisk, was right. Readers are freaks. There is really no way to deny it.

The comparison between readers and writers on this score is instructive. While writers have historically made a point of displaying themselves as unusually sensitive, troubled souls (see Verlaine, Rimbaud, Thomas Wolfe, Plath, Burroughs, Ginsberg, et al.; note that most of the truly crazy ones are poets), it is also my theory that their dramatic sufferings are very often the product of too much ambition. Too much actual, organic suffering in one's biography can make it impossible to sustain the energy and egotism necessary for a successful literary career. A career of reading, on the other hand, allows for more prolonged and spectacular forms of disturbance. It is no accident, at least, that most readers I know were unhappy children. They spent months in the hospital; endured long periods of friendlessness or bereavement; watched loved ones die of cancer; had parents who were crazy or divorced; spent formative years in a foreign country; suffered from early exposure to "fantasy" or "adventure" novels for boys or "mystery" or "romance" novels for girls; or lived through some overwhelming experience of dislocating weirdness, such as growing up on an army base, or on a farm, or in a cult.

My own reasons for bookishness are less dramatic. There were the stresses of a home where my unhappy parents fought all the time, inculcating in me a very natural desire to escape from reality. But the greatest injury I suffered was the absence of a color TV, which cut me off from the comforting stream of voices, pictures, characters, and stories in which my peers ritually immersed themselves every day after school. Assigned the role of Gilligan from *Gilligan's Island,* I remember standing on our asphalt playground in Brooklyn without the slightest idea of what to say or

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how to behave. After school, I went home and read books. It was less boring than staring up at the ceiling or listening to my parents fight.

By the age of fifteen, I was a full-time reader. I hid books under my desk. I read in the library after school. Reading was an escape from the crushing pressures of adolescence, such as speaking out loud in class or making direct eye contact with my peers in the halls. Books were a promise that I might at least learn to impersonate someone normal. I loved *The Great Gatsby*. If Gatsby himself was blurry and suspicious, Nick Carraway was the kind of friend I would have liked to have. Hemingway was good, particularly the early stories (how to talk to hoboes and boxers). Flaubert was great, particularly *Sentimental Education* (Madame Bovary reminded me of my mother). While Edith Wharton had a wonderful eye for details, I could never understand how she chose her main characters. Reading her books was like watching a brilliant hostess in her drawing room making witty observations to dullards and bores. Why she invited these people over was beyond me. Henry James was worse. Virginia Woolf was a great writer. Still, it didn't escape my attention that Septimus Smith threw himself out a window; or that Leonard Bast, my favorite character from Woolf's great predecessor, E. M. Forster, was crushed to death by a shelf of books. Woolf and Forster were snobs. Of the "modern" American writers, John Updike was like Flaubert, except he used his terrific skill to convince the reader that he actually liked Rabbit Angstrom, whereas the Updike I imagined (namely, me) would have been delighted when Rabbit's life turned mediocre and unhappy. Philip Roth was too close to home.

More than any of the other famous writers I read, J. D. Salinger, author of *Franny and Zooey*, actively courted my worshipful adolescent engagement. In the novel, the author speaks through the character of Buddy Glass, a writer who admired *The Great Gatsby*, "which was my 'Tom Sawyer' when I was twelve," and whose main business, as far as I could make out, was dispensing cracker-barrel wisdom like an old-timer at the track. Buddy was also happy to share the insider details I craved, namely the interior décor, reading habits, vocal inflections, and bathroom medicine-cabinet contents of a family of precocious, sensitive, unhappy children who lived on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. (My family lived in Brooklyn, then moved to New Jersey when I was nine. Manhattan was a dream. The mental Post-it note I attached to *Franny and Zooey* reads something like "Notes on the Inner Lives of People with Big Apartments in the East Seventies.") It was encouraging to know that my yearnings for a guide through the darkness of this world were answered by the tender proclivities (which now seem stranger and darker but no less affecting) of the famous author of *The Catcher in the Rye*, a novel that played on self-pitying adolescent instincts without offering any useful wisdom in return. Seymour Glass would have hated it. (It is no accident, I believe, that both John Hinckley, Jr., and Mark David Chapman were carrying copies of Salinger's little red book when they shot Ronald Reagan and John Lennon, respectively.)

Between the ages of fourteen and twenty-four I read *Franny and Zooey* from cover to cover at least five times. I underlined passages and made cryptic notations in the margins, hoping to become a better person—witty, literate, living in Manhattan—an acceptable character free from the bipolar alternation of uncontrolled aggression and sad passivity that I saw in my parents' marriage and was only beginning to recognize in myself.

By relating this mishmash of biographical details in a jaded, older-person voice, I hardly mean to suggest that reading was not a worthwhile habit. Nor do I intend to explain away, through an act of knowing posthumous revisitation, the failings of my fourteen-year-old self (who, by the way, deserves tons of sympathy and understanding, but whom I have little interest, should the opportunity somehow present itself, in ever meeting again: his unhappiness, his eagerness to please, and his frantic desire to escape from his family give him all the retrospective charm of a small ferret trapped in a corner). What bothers me about him has nothing to do with his aesthetic sense. It is his lack of any real capacity to enter sympathetically into the minds of other people. I read books in order to learn how to be the *right* kind of character in the *right* kind of novel. The authors of these novels were people

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(by "people" I meant people who were confident and knowing, i.e., *rich people*, or characters like Nick Carraway, who were accepted by the rich) who had condescended to share their knowledge. They were not people like my parents or me, who were anxious from morning through most of the afternoon, and at night were very often *scared to death*. It never occurred to me that the need to catalogue the stuff of everyday life might be a sign that the authors I loved were loners and misfits. Normal people, after all, don't stand around at garden parties or lie in bed with their loved ones trying to figure out what even the smallest ordinary gesture *means*.

Franny and Zooey was different. It was my *Stover at Yale*. The wisdom that Salinger was interested in dispensing was more difficult than the simple stick-to-it-iveness of Dink Stover (a step up from "striver") or my high school gym teacher, Mr. Fisk, or Fist. I never felt much identity with such well-balanced characters anyway. I didn't know anyone who went to Yale. And if I wanted to be Dink Stover (a hero-athlete, admired by his peers), or even F. Scott Fitzgerald, I also knew that they were too far a reach. In *Franny and Zooey*, the Dink Stover character, waiting on the train platform in New Haven to receive Franny Glass, was called Lane Coutell. "Lane Coutell, in a Burberry raincoat that apparently had a wool liner buttoned into it, was one of the six or seven boys out on the open platform. Or, rather, he was and he wasn't one of them." Who doesn't feel like that? In the paperback *Franny* I owned at fourteen, and have read ever since, I underlined "he was and he wasn't one of them" twice in blue ink. The tip about the Burberry coat with the wool liner seemed useful too. (Did the Yale men of 1984—the year of the Talking Heads' best album—still meet "dates" on train platforms in New Haven wearing Burberry raincoats? I believed the answer was yes.)

Still, there was no getting around the fact that I was bad at sports and had trouble looking directly at other people in the halls. And J. D. Salinger knew it. He knew that his readers feared and resented the Lane Coutells of this world with all the force of the profound self-hatred that only adolescents can muster. And unlike Fitzgerald, or Hemingway, or the author of *Stover at Yale*, whose name doesn't seem particularly worth remembering, Salinger was on our side. "I've *missed* you," Franny tells Lane. The words are no sooner out of Franny's mouth, the author quickly informs us, "than she realized that she didn't mean them at all."

That was how I felt about Lane, too, and it was at this moment that my underlining became enthusiastic. It wasn't Lane we were supposed to like. It was Franny. Lane is a self-important snob, a charm-boy, a gym-class standout who uses words like "testicularity" and then pretends that he said something else. Franny isn't fooled. And as she cuts him up, "with equal parts of self-disapproval and malice," Salinger is careful to keep the reader on her side by assuring us that her disdain is self-conscious and specific, and would never be extended to us. You don't have to hate yourself, I felt like telling Franny. Lane is an *asshole*.

Franny was blameless, brave, and falling apart. Also selfless and knowing. "I'm just sick of ego, ego, ego," she says. "My own and everybody else's." I underlined that line with a vengeance. "I'm afraid I *will* compete," one page later, was even better, rating both a five-pointed star *and* an exclamation mark in blue. The underlined passages are obvious attempts to engage the sympathies of adolescent loners by telling a familiar story (Dink Stover at Yale) from the more original and appealing reverse angle (Franny, his date, who thinks he's a jerk). They worked. I was charmed. The specter of testicularity was ridiculed and banished. Despite her emotional condition, and the difference in our ages, I might even have considered asking Franny out on a date.

The centerpiece of the next section of the book is Buddy's letter to his younger brother Zooey. I confess that my fourteen- and even my twenty-year-old selves were never very interested in this letter. The writing was looser, stammering, written by a stand-up comic with sweaty palms and a brand-new routine, looking out into the dark. I didn't want to know about Buddy Glass. I wanted to know more about Franny. I was disturbed by Salinger's desire to shift the ground of his story, to break through the conventional demands of rewriting *Stover at Yale* or early Fitzgerald from a sly, sardonic angle and infuse the voice with a more self-conscious humor that underlined

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the vulnerability of his narrator—a person of adult years and experience who was willing to admit, in public, that "I burst into tears at the first harsh or remonstrative word." I knew that line was a joke. (I wrote "joke" in blue ink in the margin.) Still, it was the kind of joke that made me nervous. Entering into a pact of sympathetic understanding with such a person, I knew, was unwise.

On my second reading, at age seventeen or eighteen, I found Buddy's sense of humor more sympathetic. I liked "if my Muses failed to provide for me, I'd go grind lenses somewhere, like Booker T. Washington." I was proud of myself for getting why the comparison between Buddy Glass and the author of *Up From Slavery* was funny. ("Unexpected," I wrote, in pedantic red ink. "*Not* Benjamin Franklin.") I also appreciated the description of Les Glass, later on in the book, as "an inveterate and wistful admirer of the wall décor at Sardi's theatrical restaurant." I underlined the phrase "theatrical restaurant," because it was the addition of those two words to "Sardi's" that made the joke work.

Funny or not, Buddy Glass—from the perspective of age fourteen, and age seventeen or eighteen, and even age twenty—was never as interesting as his dead brother Seymour, who left behind a deceptively simple three-line koan whose meaning tantalized and captivated me for ten years without ever quite becoming clear: "The little girl on the plane / Who turned her doll's head around / To look at me." Because Seymour Glass plays only a ghostly Jamesian role in *Franny and Zooey*, it seems wrong to go into my idealization of him here. Why did Seymour kill himself? Was the beauty of the little girl's gesture—is she trying to be *polite*, does she really think the doll is a *person*—not enough? Was it a protest against what the girl would become when she grew up? Or did the charming gesture contain the seeds of the adult corruption that would later destroy her soul? None of these questions can be answered within the text of *Franny and Zooey*. What's here is Buddy's practical advice to his brother: *"Act*, Zachary Martin Glass, when and where you want to, since you feel you must, but do it *with all your might."*

Zachary Martin Glass, or Zooey, was my favorite character in the book. He is Seymour and Buddy's Zen teachings, he is the rebellion against those teachings, he is funny and handsome, he is an actor, and he even bears a passing resemblance to Lane Coutell. (Both are objects of adolescent male identification. The demographics are different, that's all.) If Buddy Glass made me uneasy, Zooey was a perfect stand-in. He is an airbrushed version of Buddy, a character any adolescent misfit would be happy to have as a friend, a proof of the benign and charitable intentions of his author. After twenty pages of Buddy Glass, I was happy to be finally alone with Zooey. Someone in this family was normal. At the same time, my feelings for Zooey contained a hard, uncomfortable kernel of self-hatred that never quite dissolved, no matter how many times I read the book.

But this piece of dishonesty was more than made up for by my favorite scene in the book, the bathroom scene between Zooey and his mother, Bessie Glass. Bessie is a classic. (Les Glass is never seen except for stray references to a long-ago birthday party and his desire to serve Franny a tangerine.) She is a "svelte twilight soubrette . . . photographed . . . in her old housecoat." The sentence that follows a few pages later is worthy of Balzac, a beauty worth admiring again and again. The subject is Bessie's housecoat:

> With its many occultish-looking folds, it also served as the repository for the paraphernalia of a very heavy cigarette smoker and an amateur handyman; two oversized pockets had been added at the hips, and they usually contained two or three packs of cigarettes, several match folders, a screwdriver, a claw-end hammer, a Boy Scout knife that had once belonged to one of her sons, and an enamel faucet handle or two, plus an assortment of screws, nails, hinges, and ball-bearing casters—all of which tended to make Mrs. Glass chink faintly as she moved about in her large apartment.

Slovenly, patched together, proceeding according to a purely comic logic, if by any logic at all, and stopping just short of the darker comedy of Beckett, Bessie's old housecoat is the best description of domestic memory that I know. Perhaps the ability to find meaning in that memory is ultimately what saves us. Salin-

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ger never quite agrees. (Zooey is exasperated. Bessie is a dope.) Still, he is willing to give Bessie and her housecoat their due.

The love scene between Bessie Glass and her son is the answer to the love scene between Franny and Lane in New Haven, and to the lousy television script that Zooey reads in the bath. They are honest with each other. "This is supposed to be a family of all adults," Bessie says. She is dumb as a post. But she knows that Franny is hurt and that she can't fix it. And just when the scene might get sentimental, Buddy steps in to let us know that the eyes that used to announce the tragedy of her two dead sons now tear up with the announcement that some remote Hollywood starlet's marriage is on the rocks.

"Why the hell doesn't he kill himself and be done with it?" Zooey wonders of the absent Buddy. (That Buddy Glass is putting this sentence in Zooey's mouth didn't hit me until two readings later, in my junior year of college. I noted the additional complexity in blue.) I trusted Zooey because he was angry. "I'm a twenty-five-year-old freak and she's a twenty-year-old freak, and both those bastards are responsible."

That was where I always stopped underlining. I never marked the last line of the scene, when Zooey makes fun of his mother's pitch-perfect exit ("In the old radio days, when you were all little and all, you all used to be so—smart and happy and—just *lovely*. Morning, noon, and night."), but softly, so that "his voice wouldn't really reach her down the hall."

It was not until I was twenty-three, had graduated from college, and was living in my parents' basement in West Orange, New Jersey, that it occurred to me that Salinger was entirely serious about the last third of the book, or that *Franny and Zooey* was intended as something other than a novel. I had always wondered about the little books that Franny carried in her purse, *The Way of a Pilgrim* and *The Pilgrim Continues His Way*. Her interest in the religious practice of a thirty-three-year-old Russian peasant with a withered arm who repeats the prayer "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me" until it enters the rhythm of his heart always seemed to me like a precious symptom to which the author had devoted perhaps a little too much attention. The Jesus Prayer was not the answer to anything. What I realized, lying in bed in the basement, was that *Franny and Zooey* and *The Way of a Pilgrim* were similar, if not the same book. They were answers to the question of how to live.

The question interested me because I was twenty-three years old and living in my parents' basement. Before that, I had been living in Manhattan, in a five-room apartment on East Fourteenth Street between Second and Third Avenues that I shared with five people between the ages of twenty-four and thirty-two. I paid $320 a month for a room with three doors and no windows. It was hot in the winter. The summer was worse. People wandered in and out. The building next door was a residence for the deaf, and at night they would bring their Dominican boyfriends to our stairwell, lean up against the wall, spread their legs, open their mouths, and roll their eyes toward heaven without making a sound. Everyone I knew wore leather jackets and took drugs. Two of my roommates were heroin addicts. I was afraid to put a needle into my arm. Over time, I became afraid of the way I was living.

When I moved back home, I stopped taking drugs, which made me angrier than I had been before. I was also scared. In the book, Bessie Glass wanted to send Franny to an analyst, like Philly Byrnes.

"Philly *Byrnes*," Zooey answered. "Philly Byrnes is a poor little impotent sweaty guy past *forty* who's been sleeping for years with a rosary and a copy of *Variety* under his pillow." That wasn't me either. If there was someone out there with "any crazy, mysterious *grat*itude for his insight and intelligence," it wasn't any psychiatrist I knew. And it wasn't J. D. Salinger either. I was looking for answers, and the notes I made toward the end of the book at age twenty-four quiver with sardonic disappointment. "'Nancy Drew and the Hidden Staircase' lay on top of 'Fear and Trembling.'" That was Salinger's own line. But it seemed like a better description of the weakness of *Franny and Zooey* than anything I could invent on my own. I noticed that Franny is described as "a first-class beauty," and I found the description cheap. I underlined Zooey's line to Franny, "How in *hell* are you going to recognize a legitimate holy man when you see one if you don't even

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know a cup of consecrated chicken soup when it's right in front of your nose?" In the margin I suggested that Starbucks could use this motto on a new line of greeting cards, to be sold at the cash register for a dollar apiece.

And that's the last thing I wrote in my copy of *Franny and Zooey.* The love affair was over.

Reading the book again, for the first time as a writer, I was amazed by how many perfect moments there are, by how rich and funny and wise it is, by how much and how little I understood, and by the fact that the entire book is only two hundred pages long. I still love the bathroom scene the best. But I also love the end of the book, particularly the moment when Franny announces that she wants to talk to Seymour, the moment of pure emotion that the book has been building toward for almost the entire two hundred pages, and that Salinger, Buddy, and Zooey answer by looking out the window and seeing a little girl in a red tam, with her dachshund wandering on the sidewalk nearby. It's not Seymour exactly. It's the little girl from the airplane, or someone like her, a vision of sustaining innocence that will carry us through the harder part of the lesson, Seymour's Fat Lady, for whom Zooey Glass once imagined he polished his shoes every night before appearing on the radio. She had thick legs, very veiny, and her radio was always going full blast. She had cancer.

"There isn't anyone out there who isn't Seymour's Fat Lady," Zooey says. The Fat Lady is Christ. Or forgiveness. There was a time when this sentence didn't make sense, or didn't interest me enough to underline the words or make a check mark or a star in the margin. I'm not saying that the line is unsentimental. There are probably higher peaks of wisdom to climb. Still, in the interests of full disclosure, it seems only fair to relate that after I closed the book, I opened it again, got out my fancy new disposable fountain pen, and added a black check mark to the author's italics. I am still grateful for this book. That is what I mean to say.

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Too Good to Check

SUE HUBBELL

A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains
By Isabella Lucy Bird. University of Oklahoma Press. $29.95.

"I abhor civilisation," exclaimed Isabella Bird, late in life and after her best-selling travel books had made her the talk of London. She had lectured widely by that time, been presented at court, and been elected the first woman fellow of the Royal Geographical Society. So by way of escape, in 1894, this stout dumpling of a woman, a perpetual invalid, made plans to flee England and travel through China, Japan, and Korea. She was sixty-three years old and, once again, would regain her health by hard travel to a faraway place. Today some of Bird's thirteen travel books are forgotten, but a number have been reissued and one, *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains,* first published in 1879, has become a classic.

The newest edition of the book, the one to hand, is edited by Ernest S. Bernard, a professor of English and summertime ranger in the Colorado mountains. It will be welcome reading for those who have already discovered Bird, and a good introduction for those who haven't. The moderately literate reader may not need Bernard's translations of Bird's few foreign phrases and and his identifications of her high-flown Victorian literary references, but the extensive notation, including an appendix on the geography of the area, is helpful, as are the photographs and maps.

Bernard's introduction places Isabella Bird in historical context and presents her as an early environmental writer who wrote with such understanding of what was then called Estes Park—where she holed up for many winter months—that she helped save it. In Colorado, "park" simply meant an open mountain valley, but Rocky Mountain National Park, which includes the area of which Bird wrote, was not formally created until 1915.

The reason that Bird's books, and this one in particular, were to outlast other Victorian travel books, with their frothy descriptions of mountain crags and sunsets, is simply that she was a superior writer. Her style was fresh, sprightly, and knowing—and she liked a good story. Bird's recounting of her adventures, the stories she told on herself in her books and to her biographer, were apt to involve episodes to which only she could testify. But her stories are so good that only a dyspeptic churl would raise doubts about them. At eighteen, she foils an assassination of a cabinet minister. A few years later, she brings a pickpocket to justice with the coolness we all yearned for when young. In middle age, brandishing her revolver, she calmly faces down "threatening tribesmen" in Persia. These are stories, as we say in the trade, that are too good to check.

Isabella Lucy Bird was born in 1831 in Yorkshire, the daughter of a Sunday-school teacher and her curate husband, Edward Bird. In earlier generations his family had been much given to cousin marriage; perhaps the inbreeding was in part responsible for the familial tendency toward bright edginess and frail bodies. Isabella was considered so frail that Edward made a practice of carrying his small daughter on a pillow in front of his saddle when he rode out. Fragile health, of course, was no excuse for mental laxity, so on his rides he explained to the child the workings of water wheels, the identity of every plant they passed, the heights and distances of objects along the way. Then he would quiz her and drill her until she had committed the new information to memory—not bad training for a future travel and nature writer. Like other women of her times, she continued her education at home.

Sue Hubbell's books include *A Country Year: Living the Questions; Far Flung Hubbell;* and, most recently, *Waiting for Aphrodite: Journeys into the Time Before Bones.*

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Her only fault, by family report, was her sharp and caustic wit (which, her writings suggest, she retained in adulthood).

Isabella grew in strength. Her first real bout of "spinal problems" seems to have taken place when her father was dismissed from his curacy for being overzealous in his disapproval of work on Sundays in a dairy district where cows required daily milking. Edward Bird's Sabbatarianism and evangelical bent, coupled with his own neurasthenia, also cost him subsequent curacies; each time, he moved his family to a new location. Today it is impossible to know what effect these painful disruptions had on his high-strung daughter, but they cannot have helped. She was often invalid. "Spinal irritation" was a common and even fashionable diagnosis for women in the mid-1800s, and a variety of cures involving spinal blistering, bed rest, operations, and baths were prescribed. Some were tried on Isabella—who, despite her health problems, had already at sixteen published a tract of "remarkable invective" (as her official biography put it) dealing with Free Trade and Protectionism. Fortunately for her, and for travel literature, a doctor suggested the sea-air cure and travel. So at the age of twenty-four she left for her first voyage to America, where she regained her health as the hardships of travel (and the distance from home) increased.

She wrote cheerful letters full of colorful detail to her sister Henrietta, also a frail young woman, and those letters became the basis for her first book, *An Englishwoman in America*, published in 1856. The book was a popular success and a financial one too, for in those days authors received two-thirds of the profits from a book's sale. Buoyed by the prospect of earning her own way in the world, and delighted by the discovery of her own hearty physicality, Bird created a career: she would go to places considered impossible for a woman, under circumstances shocking to Victorian readers, and write about them. Her health invariably deteriorated when she returned to England, but it always revived under conditions of hardship in far-off places.

In her late sixties, probably already ailing from the cancer that took her life in 1904, Isabella Bird traveled by ship to Morocco, where she was to ride horseback through the wild Atlas Mountains. Her description of her arrival is typical:

> The landing was so terrible, and the sea so wild, that the captain insisted on my being lowered into the boat by the ship's crane in a coal basket. The officers and passengers cheered my pluck as the boat mounted a huge breaking surge on her landward adventure. No cargo could be landed. I have never been in so rough a sea. . . . When the only camping ground turned out to be a rough plowed field with water standing in the furrows, and the tent was pitched in a storm of wind and rain, and many of the tent pegs would not hold, and when the bed went down into the slush, I thought I should die there—but I had no more illness.

Early in her travels Bird decided she could not abide the standard lady's sidesaddle, so she dressed in bloomers, decorously covered with a long, cumbersome skirt, and rode astride in the American Western saddle (called Mexican in those days). She was able to outride most men she encountered in the American West, where she arrived in 1873. She was pressed to join cattle roundups by her principal host in Estes Park, where she was, for long stretches of winter, the only woman in a household of men. She enjoyed their company, but withindoors at least, she remained starchily the English lady. Withoutdoors, however, she showed she was tough. She could keep her horse up in blizzards and haul him to his feet when he fell on ice. She could bring in cattle. She could handle barn chores. She also developed a taste for desperadoes, provided they had nice manners, and she revealed in the private passages of her letters (edited out when she published them) that at least one, an outlaw named Jim Nugent—known as Mountain Jim—had made her a declaration of love and unspecified intent. "He is," she confided to Henrietta, "a man whom any woman might love, but whom no sane woman would marry." Many of Bird's letters are quoted at length in Evelyn Kaye's biography, *Amazing Traveller.*

Bird had sailed to the Pacific coast of America from the Sandwich Islands in the early autumn of 1873, and had then made her way eastward to the Rockies. Her book described one of her first adventures there, experienced in the company of Mountain Jim. It took place during an

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October ascent, in much too chancy weather, of Long's Peak, near Estes Park. The climb had been undertaken with little preparation and no water. Bird grew fatigued in the thin air and was shivering in her flannel riding dress. However, she made it to the top. Then she and Jim began the descent. "I had various falls," she recorded, "and once hung by my frock, which caught on a rock, and 'Jim' severed it with his hunting knife, upon which I fell into a crevice full of soft snow." Enough to make a man and woman fall in love.

In 1881, at the age of forty-six, Bird was married somewhat reluctantly to Dr. John Bishop, who had attended her sister during her final illness. The doctor himself died only five years later, and Bird resumed her travels and her writing. The marriage was brief (though apparently fond), and Bird's writing life was long; nevertheless, many libraries, including the Library of Congress, have followed the outmoded practice of listing her under her husband's name. That is where the reader who enjoys *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains,* and wants more, may have to seek her.

There are other Bird biographies in addition to the previously cited *Amazing Traveller.* Anna Stoddart was a friend of Bird's and wrote the authorized account, *The Life of Isabella Bird (Mrs. Bishop),* published in 1907. Margaret Tabor included a biography of Bird in her 1930 book *Pioneer Women.* Ernest Bernard, in this excellent and attractive new edition of Bird's best-known book, includes a good bibliography listing yet other biographies, as well as helpful source material about the context of her experiences in the American West. And her experiences are as extraordinary to readers today as they were when she was the toast of London.

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The War to End All Wars

THE FIRST WORLD WAR
By John Keegan. Knopf. $35.

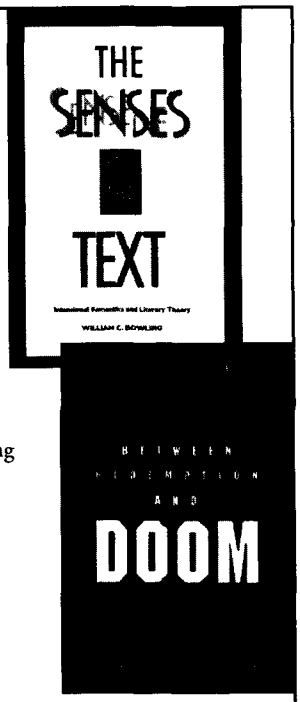
Reviewed by JOHN EISENHOWER

"The First World War," writes military historian John Keegan, "was a tragic and unnecessary conflict." That, one might observe, is the understatement of the year. The mass slaughter that ravaged three continents from August 3, 1914, to November 11, 1918, claimed the lives of ten million people, ruined those of millions more, and led to a second world war twenty years later. It also, in the author's words, "destroyed the benevolent and optimistic culture of the European continent." The Allies (Britain, France, Italy, and Romania—later joined by the United States) fought the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and Turkey) to a standstill in a war of attrition. Eventually the potential weight of the Americans, whose full power had yet to be felt by late 1918, convinced the Germans of the war's futility and brought it to an end.

Despite its size and its impact on twentieth-century civilization, the First World War has been largely forgotten, overshadowed by its legacy, World War II. To remedy that, Keegan (whose other books include *Fields of Battle* and *The History of Warfare*) has set out to distill the elements of the war for readers to whom the names Versailles, Lloyd George, Clemenceau, and even Woodrow Wilson are at best vague memories. Despite the daunting nature of his task, Keegan has produced an excellent overview: broad, clinical, sometimes entertaining, though also sometimes didactic. His greatest interest lies in the political side of the war, where he writes seamlessly and with assurance. The military campaigns provide him less latitude for his literary skills.

The author makes a strong case for calling the war "unnecessary." Though Europe was,

John Eisenhower's recent books include *Agent of Destiny: The Life and Times of General Winfield Scott* and *The Bitter Woods: The Battle of the Bulge in World War II.*



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unfortunately, armed to the teeth, nobody wanted war. It came as a result of a series of blunders made by several nations during the summer of 1914, set off by the murder of Archduke Ferdinand, heir to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in the Bosnian town of Sarajevo. On June 28, 1914, the archduke and his wife were shot by an Austrian citizen of Serbian descent, a member of a radical Serbian independence group. A furious Austrian government blamed the Serbian kingdom for complicity in the assassination, but before taking action, paused to secure assurances of support from the vacationing kaiser of Germany. That delay allowed time for Serbia's ally, Russia, to mobilize and finally declare war on Austria. Germany sided with Austria. France, allied with Russia, declared war on Germany on August 3, 1914, and Britain soon followed suit. Keegan blames Austrian hesitation; the nervousness of Russian Czar Nicholas II, who ordered mobilization; and German General Helmuth von Moltke's similar mobilization order—issued without authority from the civilian German government—for precipitating the disaster. So deftly does Keegan tell the story that the reader, who knows better, is still kept in suspense.

The Serbs, incidentally, seem to have changed little since 1914. Tied closely to Russia through their Orthodox Christianity and Slavic brotherhood, they had been hardened by their long years of guerrilla resistance to Turkish rule. Their poverty and warlike qualities had "rendered them headstrong and self-reliant but also, in Austrian eyes, devious and untrustworthy." Even in 1914, the small independent Serbian kingdom harbored ambitions for Balkan hegemony. "National rebirth," Keegan writes, "had raised the idea of a Greater Serbia, strong within the kingdom and a beacon to Austria's Serbs in Bosnia and Croatia."

On the military side, *The First World War* covers the long, complicated campaigns in an uneven manner. When conceptualizing a campaign—such as his critique of the vaunted Schlieffen plan for enveloping the French by attack through Belgium—Keegan is superb. But he can get bogged down, and many of his battle descriptions can fairly be called turgid. Yet he has, admittedly, few options. The complicated nature of those battles requires him to choose between completeness and readability; he has opted for completeness.

Between his detailed discussions of battles, Keegan spices his narrative with occasional tidbits—for example, the French commander in Paris who prepared the Eiffel Tower for demolition lest the Germans, if they took the city, make use of it as a radio tower. Keegan also allows us an occasional chuckle. The British First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir John Fisher, was "as ready with bad as with good ideas." His superior, First Lord of the Admiralty Winston Churchill, was, according to Keegan, "equally undiscriminating if a strategic project were grand enough."

The First World War is valuable for providing a balance between the areas of conflict, those generally considered major and those considered minor. Keegan continually reminds us that the eastern front was nearly as important as the western. Operations in such areas as Bulgaria, Romania, the Middle East, and even the African colonies are also covered extensively. This is, however, a British book, pointed toward a British audience. The descriptions of the battles around Ypres and Passchendaele, for example, are described in excruciating detail. Keegan also seems obsessed with the ill-concealed conflict between British Prime Minister David Lloyd George and his military commander, Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig. Lloyd George considered Haig to be profligate of British lives, and Keegan seems to agree with the prime minister: "On the Somme," he writes, "[Haig] had sent the flower of British youth to death or mutilation; at Passchendaele he had tipped the survivors into the slough of despond."

The author's treatment of the American effort is surprisingly weak, especially considering his close relations with this country. He frankly acknowledges the crucial effect of the American potential on German and Allied morale, but he does so in a rather left-handed fashion. "A German army unable to make good its losses was now confronted by a new enemy, the U.S. Army, with four million fresh troops in action or training," he writes. He then minimizes the American significance by adding, "More pertinently, its old enemies, the British and French, now had a new technical arm, their tank forces, with which to alter the terms

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of engagement." The two are hardly of the same significance. More astonishing, however, is Keegan's offhanded treatment of the operations in which American forces participated. He mentions the highly publicized but minor action at Belleau Wood, but never refers to the critically important Meuse-Argonne campaign by name. It was in the Meuse-Argonne that the modern American army was formed. In the process, General John J. Pershing's force lost approximately fifty-five thousand men during the five weeks of the campaign—more than the total American battle deaths in eight years of the war in Vietnam.

Yet any American must realize how small, in terms of actual fighting, was our contribution to the Allied victory. If nothing else, this book reminds us just how wide and costly the Allied effort was. But there is no reason for Americans to be envious of the laurels won by others. As Keegan observes, "The chronicles of [the war's] battles provide the dreariest literature in military history; no brave trumpets sound in memory for the drab millions who plodded to death on the featureless plains of Picardy and Poland; no litanies are sung for the leaders who coaxed them to slaughter."

Lit. Crit. and the Infinite

THE BROKEN ESTATE: ESSAYS ON LITERATURE AND BELIEF
By James Wood. Random House. $24.

Reviewed by SANFORD PINSKER

James Wood concludes a review-essay focusing on Thomas Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon* with these in-your-face words: "Pynchon uses allegory to hide truth, and in so doing expands allegory into a fetish of itself." The result, Wood goes on to argue, is not allegory, but "merely the allegorical," which is to say, "novels that draw attention to their own significance, which hang without reference, pointing like a severed arm to nowhere in particular."

Sanford Pinsker, a professor at Franklin and Marshall College, is the author of *Between Two Worlds: The American Novel in the 1960s* and *Bearing the Bad News: Contemporary American Literature and Culture.*

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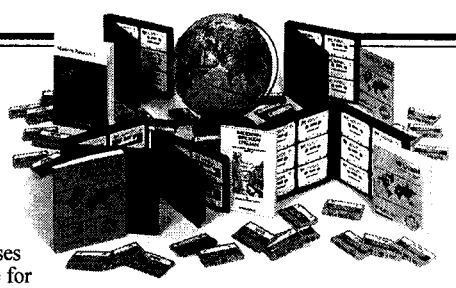

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None of this will gladden the hearts of those who regard Pynchon as postmodernism's poster boy, nor will they find much solace in the fact that Wood is an equal-opportunity basher who takes on the likes of Don DeLillo, Toni Morrison, and John Updike, and finds them just as lacking. However, the really bad news—at least for those invested heavily in literary flavors of the month—is that Wood shows every promise of giving contemporary fiction precisely what it needs; and since he is only in his early thirties, he is likely to be a thorn in somebody's side for decades to come.

The twenty-one pieces collected in *The Broken Estate* cover a range of authors (Austen, Flaubert, and Chekhov, as well as D. H. Lawrence, Thomas Mann, and T. S. Eliot); but each is part of a continuing argument about what novels can and cannot do once traditional religious beliefs become significantly altered. "The moment at which Jesus became the hero of a novel, of a 'prose poem,'" Wood writes, "he also became fictional. The old estate broke. Jesus lost his divinity, became only an inspiring fantasist. We may wonder what use Jesus is if he is a figure no different from Socrates on the one hand and Daniel Deronda on the other." Wood reminds us that in Europe, the mid-nineteenth century was at once the moment when religion began to talk self-consciously about itself and when the novel reached its high point. Let Matthew Arnold stand as representative of the impulse to turn religion into merely "good conduct and poetry," and in the process, to separate religious belief from what Wood calls "the precinct of truth."

Christian critics have not had a place at the literary table for some time, and as for "truth," it is, my fashionable colleagues tell me, a very contested business, one that richly deserved the sneer quotes I've given it. But to all this blather Wood replies with a firm "No! in thunder": "I can see no way in which it is a good thing for humans to have accidentally and pointlessly evolved on an earth which they must inhabit (irrespective of my own local happiness). Life under God seems a pointlessness posing as a purpose (the purpose, presumably, being to love God and to be loved in return); life without God seems to me also a pointlessness posing as a purpose (jobs, family, sex, and so on—all the usual distractions). The advantage, if it can be described as one, of living in the latter state, without God, is that the false purpose has at least been invented by man, and one can strip it away to reveal the actual pointlessness."

Whatever one makes of Wood's theological ruminations (some will no doubt find them puzzling, others will insist that such considerations, however nuanced, are irrelevant to the business of judging novels), the fact is that he is one of the few reviewers who continue to think of fiction as having enormous consequences for the state of one's soul. That's why Wood finds himself so disappointed by John Updike's soft Christianity and why, by contrast, the pure savagery of Philip Roth's *Sabbath's Theater* proves so fatally attractive. In the case of Updike, Wood's title—"The Complacency of John Updike"—gives his game away. Updike, he argues, is not only wedded to "lyric kitsch" but also to a tender-hearted vision that sees God as neither flaming presence nor flaming absence. Indeed, if God exists in an Updike novel, He is safely tucked within the folds of lyrically rendered detail—no more telling than other minutiae the world throws our way. This, according to Wood, is the great limitation of Updike's much overpraised style: "At his worst, his prose is a

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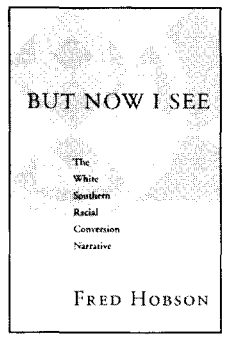
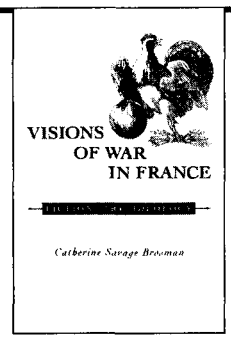
harmless, puffy lyricism, a seigneurial gratuity, as if language were just a meaningless bill to a very rich man and Updike adding a lazy ten percent tip to each sentence. Instead, let us examine his strange theological serenity, the stainless quality that ensures that his books never quite agitate us (or, on the other hand, never quite console us) as great works do."

Moreover, sex exists for Updike "as grass does, or the metallic sheen of an air-conditioning unit." Not so for the Philip Roth of *Sabbath's Theater,* a novel that has been rightly described as "seriously filthy," but that strikes Wood as one of the few contemporary American fictions to make sex meaningful. Why so? Because sex lies at the center of Mickey Sabbath's nihilism, relentless self-destruction, and rage against the dying of his light. The result is a novel in which the truth is not "confessed, or even postmodernistically 'confessed,' but revealed."

I do not always agree with Wood's magisterial pronouncements about great fiction (e.g., must it always be "an argument about belief"? Can it not also be a meditation on politics, or a lover's quarrel with the world?), but, taken together, the essays in *The Broken Estate* make me think harder than I usually do about the inextricable relationship between literature and belief. This is especially true for authors who have ridden the bandwagon of magical realism to the stars. For example, when the opening sentence of a review-essay points out that "since fiction is itself a kind of magic, the novel should not be magical," it comes as no surprise that the essay to follow will hammer away at Toni Morrison's *Paradise,* a novel Wood sums up as a "choir for superstition, and rarely an examination of it. It is a novel babyishly cradled in magic. It is deeply sentimental, evasive, and cloudy. It slights truth. It forces magic and pure rhapsodies on its characters like a demented anesthetist bullying patients with laughing gas."

If it is true that Wood is an unashamedly and uncompromisingly moral critic, it is even truer that he is often far more daring and usually more brilliant than many who first traveled over the shaky bridge linking literature with Christian belief. Those who have followed his work will recognize the passion and perspective he brings to his criticism. Those meeting Wood for the first time are in for a series of shocks, as well as for a very considerable treat.





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Pleasure Grounds

A Clearing in the Distance: Frederick Law Olmsted and America in the Nineteenth Century
By Witold Rybczynski. Scribner. $28.

Reviewed by ROBERT WILSON

On March 25, 1893, five weeks before the opening of the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, a remarkable group of artists and dignitaries gathered in the Concert Hall at Madison Square Garden for a dinner to honor Daniel Burnham, the Chicago architect who had served as impresario of the fair's design and construction. Burnham had assembled so illustrious a team of architects and others for the project that after one of their planning sessions, Augustus Saint-Gaudens had said to him, "Do you realize that this is the greatest meeting of artists since the fifteenth century!" Most of these luminaries—Saint-Gaudens, Richard Morris Hunt, Charles McKim, and more—were at the dinner in New York, as were Louis Comfort Tiffany, William Dean Howells, and Charles Eliot Norton, among a total of 270 guests.

When Hunt proposed a toast to the evening's honoree, Burnham rose and thanked all of those who had contributed to the construction of the fair. Then he said, "Each of you knows the name and genius of him who stands first in the heart and confidence of American artists, the creator of your own parks and many other city parks. . . . An artist, he paints with lakes and wooded slopes; with lawns and banks and forest-covered hills; with mountainsides and ocean views. He should stand where I do tonight, not for the deeds of later years alone, but for what his brain has wrought and his pen has taught for half a century." My eyes moistened as I read these generous words late in Witold Rybczynski's admirable new biography of Frederick Law Olmsted (1822–1903), the subject of Burnham's tribute. Unfortunately, Olmsted himself was not there to hear the effusive Burnham. He had been invited, of course. With his partner at the time, Harry Codman, Olmsted as consulting landscape architect had come up with the overall design scheme for the fair. But the invitation to the dinner had mentioned the exposition's contributions to the arts of architecture, sculpture, and painting—no mention of landscape architecture—and so Olmsted had managed to be out of town on the auspicious date.

Olmsted, who had developed a quiet dignity to match his achievement and his pride, said nothing publicly about the slight to his profession, which he embodied as no other American artist has embodied an art form. Still, when his good friend Norton, the famous Harvard professor of art history—to whom Rybczynski supposes Olmsted would have felt obliged to explain his absence—spoke at the dinner, he was quick to say that "the general design of the grounds and of the arrangement of the buildings was in every respect noble, original and satisfactory, a work of fine art not generally included in the list of poetic arts, but one of the most important of them all to America—that of the landscape architect. Of all American artists, Frederick Law Olmsted . . . stands first in the production of great works which answer the needs and give expression to the life of our immense and miscellaneous democracy."

Olmsted disliked the term *landscape architecture* almost as much as he disliked flowers. These two surprising aversions are related to his belief, expressed in a letter to Calvert Vaux, that their achievement in designing New York's Central Park (1858–76) amounted to the creation of a new art form. "The art is not gardening nor is it architecture," he wrote. Nor would he call it landscape architecture, a designation that had been coined in England a quarter of a century earlier. "If you are bound to establish this new art," he continued, "you don't want an old name for it"—although Olmsted had no suggestions for another. The materials of this form were, as Burnham suggested, immense: ponds, streams, hills, vast expanses of grass, trees. A shrub was as small as Olmsted would go; flowers were too much like gardening.

Yet he was anything but an *artiste.* Olmsted's approach to a new project, as Rybczynski shows

Robert Wilson is editor of *Preservation* magazine, published by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. He was formerly the literary editor of *Civilization* magazine and book editor of *USA Today.*

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time and again, was not to impose his aesthetic on the landscape so much as to look closely at the problem at hand and come up with a solution that enhanced what was already there. The most striking example, perhaps, was his plan for a city park on the mountain from which Montreal takes its name. Before he visited the city, Olmsted felt "diffidence in my ability to do justice to so unusual a problem"—the problem of building a park on the hilly slopes of Mount Royal. But once he ascended the mountain and saw its views of the city, of the St. Lawrence River, and even of distant mountain ranges, Olmsted realized that the views were what would make the park special and that "the immediate local landscape conditions are of much less consequence than they usually are in pleasure grounds, and that . . . they should be subdued in character." He did not try to make the mountain into a park per se, calling that "wasteful"; instead he made the mountain a *better* mountain, thinning trees where the soil was poor, thickening them in a forest, planting shrubs and vines to make a cliff more dramatic-looking, building a gently ascending carriage road and then giving detailed instructions for planting its edges. In the end he even asked that "the term *park,* as applied to the mountain, should be discarded." As Rybczynski, who lived in Montreal himself for twenty years, reminds us, Olmsted's great work is to this day simply called Mount Royal.

The modesty and confidence required to present a plan that drew so little attention to its creator was related to another quality in Olmsted's designs. As he himself put it, "I have all my life been considering distant effects and always sacrificing immediate success and applause to that of the future." Another way of putting this would be to say that Olmsted knew and accepted the limitations of his medium. As several sets of photographs in this biography show, any landscape design (except for something as ephemeral as a world's fair) takes time to become itself: trees grow tall and wide; shrubs soften buildings and bridges; a broad empty expanse of grass eventually looks like a meadow. What made Olmsted a great American

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artist, and what made landscape architecture in his hands a great American form, had to do with this tension between romantic and rationalist views of nature. Olmsted's role was to bring nature back into the cities that had violated the earthly paradise the North American continent had once been. To do so, parks (and the ideal suburbs Olmsted would also design) had to give the illusion of wilderness—but wilderness made better than itself, wildness tamed. These conflicting impulses are with us yet. As we build sprawling suburbs in fields that once domesticated the forest, land trusts and public lands have multiplied. And Olmsted parks that matured forty and fifty years after he built them and then went to seed are now being restored to his vision for them.

Like all fine biographers, Rybczynski has such a profound feeling for his subject that he is often at his best when the least is known and he is forced to impose his informed speculations upon the silent places in the life. He deals with the young Olmsted, a wanderer in the world and among professions until his mid-thirties, with boldness and tact, imagining what the young man must have felt here, reading between the lines of his letters there. As the biography lengthens and Olmsted's life becomes thick with well-documented projects, Rybczynski recedes somewhat and the book becomes more ordinary, except in the course of italicized passages in which the biographer creates fiction-like scenes of important moments in Olmsted's life.

In the century since that dinner at Madison Square Garden, landscape architecture has remained in the public mind a minor art form at best, and this is undoubtedly why Olmsted has never gotten quite as much recognition as he is due, given his enduring impact on American cities and suburbs. Perhaps *A Clearing in the Distance,* which elaborates those effects so effectively, will win a greater appreciation for the man, if not for the form.

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Lost Innocence

In Plato's Cave

By Alvin Kernan. Yale University Press. $25.

Reviewed by
ALEX SOOJUNG-KIM PANG

The title of Alvin Kernan's memoir is deeply ironic, but you have to expect that from someone trained in New Criticism who has witnessed at close range the transformation of the modern American university. Kernan's career as a scholar and administrator spans the most tumultuous years in postwar higher education, and he intends his memoir to be not just his own story, but the story of a changing academic world.

The book begins with the author, fresh from wartime service in the Pacific (an experience he described in *Crossing the Line*), about to set off for college. His early educational philosophy was, he recalls, remarkably innocent: "I was one of those who feel that the most satisfactory end in life is knowledge. . . . Read the right books and listen to the right people, think in the most intense and logical fashion, I believed, totally and without question, and all the darkness of Plato's cave of illusions would burn away in the bright sun of understanding." Almost by accident Kernan discovered Williams College ("*the* college . . . the myth of ivy-covered buildings, spartan living, transcendentalism and bold thinking" come to life), and after graduating he won a fellowship to Oxford. On his return to America, he enrolled at Yale, then a bastion of the New Criticism. Cleanth Brooks, Robert Penn Warren, and W. K. Wimsatt were among his teachers; Harold Bloom was a classmate. Kernan joined the Yale faculty in 1954, eventually becoming an administrator during Kingman Brewster's turbulent presidency. He moved to Princeton in 1973, and after retiring from teaching spent the late 1980s and most of the 1990s at the Andrew Mellon Foundation.

Alex Soojung-Kim Pang is project manager of SiliconBase, a digital archive of the history of Silicon Valley, located at Stanford University.

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Fifty years later his innocence is long gone, but Kernan's faith in the goodness of the *vita contemplativa* is unshakable.

His account of the academic world is by turns hilarious, harrowing, and tragic, but always insightful. Williams College, still genteel and classbound in the 1940s, is right out of Evelyn Waugh, or maybe *Animal House*. More than a few of Kernan's teachers or colleagues are ruined by the seismic pressures of academic life or their own sense of professional inadequacy. Lots of people in the book die young, or slowly. Even tenure comes across as a poisoned chalice that can destroy the losers and damage the winners. There's a terrible intimacy in having your fate rest in the hands of friends (or are they friends?) and peers whom you see every day; who must weigh your scholarly achievements against budgetary constraints, the demands of senior colleagues, and college politics; and with whom you must be collegial no matter what happens (lest you acquire a bad reputation that prevents you from getting another job). For those who win, the brass ring of lifetime employment may look more like a life sentence. Having been through many a job search, I thought I was already familiar with the worst of what the process could offer; but at least unsuccessful job candidates don't have to socialize with the people who reject them.

This sense of pathos, mixed with an appreciation of the benefits that postwar changes have brought to universities, gives Kernan's book its remarkable tone. Unlike many academic memoirs, *In Plato's Cave* is not a jeremiad, and rarely does it grow shrill: the picture it paints is too nuanced to be rendered in black and white. Kernan's treatment of deconstruction exemplifies his general approach. He isn't sympathetic to it—arguments about the uncertain foundations of knowledge and evidence were already old hat to sophisticated scholars—but he does manage to describe it in a manner that lay readers can comprehend, and he refuses to see deconstruction as the ultimate crisis of Western civilization or Nazism in drag. (Ever since the revelations about the wartime writings of Paul de Man—whom Kernan, incidentally, helped bring to Yale—a few authors have argued that deconstruction's philosophical roots can be found in the Third Reich and even that arguments about the indeterminacy of meaning led

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to the Nazi horrors, later provided tools for covering up the pasts of collaborators turned professors, and, more recently, helped pave the way for campus speech codes.) Likewise, Kernan has no sympathy for the faculty and student radicals who besieged Yale during the Bobby Seale trial, but he is fairer with his old opponents than one might have expected.

Rather than settle old scores, *In Plato's Cave* describes the structural forces that have transformed academia during Kernan's lifetime, creating fertile grounds for savvy professors to push daring ideas and for determined advocates of socially oriented academic programs to get their way. The university system has expanded tremendously: existing schools have grown, and thousands of new universities, community colleges, and technical schools have opened since World War II. The growth of federal funding of undergraduate education, advanced scholarship in the arts and humanities, scientific and medical research, and everyday operating expenses (subsidized by "overhead" on grants) have led to a degree of government involvement in academic affairs that would have been unthinkable a few decades ago. Changes in faculty life have hardened the strict, yet more genteel, divisions of Kernan's youth. The top of the academic ladder is now populated by a small number of highly paid, constantly courted superstars. At the bottom is an immense corps of nontenured *ronin* Ph.D.'s who have no chance of winning permanent jobs. The middle has gotten smaller. Administrators' responsibilities and duties have grown (someone, after all, has to fill out all those federal forms and be pilloried in the student newspaper), while respect for decanal authority has eroded since the 1960s. Student occupations of presidents' offices were then the most visible manifestation, but faculty members across the political spectrum lost "the old trust in authority, and perhaps the old fear of it, as well." The realities of this new world took their toll, especially on the idealistic and well-intentioned: at the end of his presidency at Yale, A. Bartlett Giamatti confessed to Kernan "that he had come to hate much of the university for its hypocritical, self-serving, and cowardly ways."

The opening of the franchise for higher education; increased federal patronage; changes in administrative and managerial practices; and shifts in the balance of power among deans, faculty, and students amount to a revolution in higher education. The irony is that this ill-managed factory system has come into being exactly when universities have become the focus of tremendous social expectations and personal aspirations. They are now the gatekeepers to the professions, the guarantors of entry into the middle class, the fulcrum around which society can be remade, and the secret weapons in our struggles for global competitiveness. They're also damnably expensive. Small wonder that it's harder and harder to keep everyone happy: in this environment, embracing postmodernism or cultural studies becomes the scholar's equivalent of exotic financial instruments; students carefully weigh what William James called the cash value of ideas, and the prime directive to administrators is to avoid lawsuits. Contesting parties have less to lose by hurling charges and countercharges, threatening legal action, and confronting administrators with "nonnegotiable" demands. But having gone to college on the GI Bill, and made a career in a profession that earlier would have shunned poor young men from Saratoga, Wyoming (to say nothing of ambitious Jews from New York or women from anywhere), Kernan sees himself as a beneficiary of the same democratizing forces that later gave rise to student radicals and litigious faculty members. Even his description of being gently pushed into retirement is colored by the recognition that the dynamics that made his career in the 1950s had made him redundant in the 1980s.

Kernan made good use of his retirement from Princeton. He says little about his later work, but he did write five books, two of

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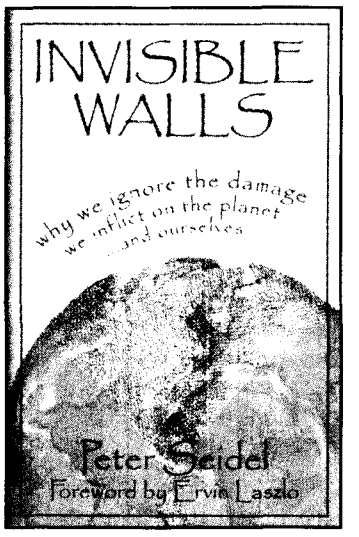
Why We Ignore the Damage We Inflict on the Planet . . . and Ourselves

PETER SEIDEL

Foreword by Ervin Laszlo



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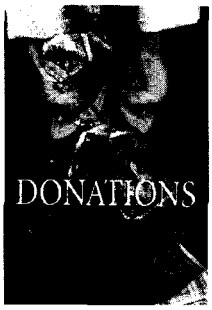
Dangerous Donations

Northern Philanthropy and Southern Black Education, 1902–1930

Eric Anderson and Alfred A. Moss, Jr.



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which—*Printing Technology, Letters, and Samuel Johnson* (1987) and *The Death of Literature* (1990)—are stimulating (and given the rise of the Internet and electronic publishing, very timely) examinations of the relationship between technological change and the "social construction" of authorship and literature. The term *social construction* is picked up from his trendier colleagues, but Kernan uses it in an innovative way. Most constructivists in the 1960s and 1970s thought it sufficient to show that literature, science, and art are not autonomous, disinterested realms, but are powerfully shaped by politics, technology, and other forces. Earlier than almost anyone else, Kernan realized that the real challenge is not to show how knowledge is "really social," but to investigate how the mechanics of social construction work and to yield critical results that can be stable and respected for centuries. (Like the principal character in Mark Leyner's hilarious "Alex the Postmodernist," I was trained as a constructivist, and it took me a decade to figure this out.) Kernan's books also show that it is possible to approach the questions posed by contemporary theory using more traditional tools and accessible language—no small feat in a period in which opaqueness has been a bête noir of scholarly publishing.

In Plato's Cave should be read as Alvin Kernan's attempt to do for the modern university what his earlier books did for literature: reveal the deep forces underlying the upheavals and spectacles. Just as some scholars are now producing works that are theoretically ambitious yet accessible, so too will historians of the postwar university eventually follow Kernan in perceiving the debates over affirmative action, the creation of new majors and departments, the adoption of campus speech codes, and the advent of seemingly endless "culture wars" not in Manichaean terms, but as complex dramas played out in the context of significant changes in faculty governance, academic management, governmental intervention, and the place of the university in American society. That the author has been able to weave such an ambitious program into an autobiography is especially impressive. The cave thing may not have worked out, but Kernan made good anyway: Socrates would consider this an examined life well worth living.

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THE READER REPLIES

MY FATHER AND THE WEAK-EYED DEVILS

Having just read James Trilling's essay about his father, Lionel Trilling, in the Spring 1999 issue of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, and a sampling of both the laudatory and the scornful reactions it has provoked in the press, I want to thank him publicly for his courage and eloquence and to praise his ability to use prismatic episodes in order to illuminate a complex story.

The frustrations of undiagnosed (and therefore misunderstood) attention deficit disorder must nearly equal the frustrations of trying to explain the symptoms and sequelae to a world that responds "Yes, but . . . " or "Where's the diagnosis?" During more than a quarter of a century of professional work, I've helped parents understand their children: the dyslexias, specific language disabilities, learning disabilities, ADD/ADHD. A common saying is that parents must mourn the child they were expecting before they can accept the child who has arrived. Difficult, unwelcome, or disheartening as the task may be initially, parents are obliged to try to understand and to help. It is their job, a command performance. Conversely, James Trilling is a child trying to understand a parent. His bravery and compassion as he reverses the process is a volunteer assignment.

That he applies his intellect, his own emotional archaeology, and his humor to understanding the private people who lived inside his parents' public images, and that he then shares with us his insights about them and his honesty about himself, is an act of generosity.

The days in which dyslexics were misunderstood, hence bullied, cajoled, humiliated, or shunned, are mercifully past. Not so, yet, for those (of all ages) subject to the bungee jumps of ADD/ADHD. To date, personal histories are our best proof. James Trilling provides a stunner.

PRISCILLA L. VAIL
Bedford, New York

I believe that the essay by James Trilling is an exercise unworthy of the magazine and antipathetic to the proper use of psychiatric information. I shall not belabor the obvious defects of this essay—its tortured language, its mean spirit, its tendentious logic, its errors of fact (for example: amobarbital can produce physical dependence up to and including delirium tremens on withdrawal), and its ignorance of diagnostic methods in psychiatry that let its author choose, on the most untrustworthy grounds, the trendy category, attention deficit disorder, to pin on his father, a serious and brilliant man of letters. There are more fundamental reasons to deplore this work.

First, the essay serves no purpose other than the egotism of its author. He draws from a privileged relationship to attach a psychiatric label to his father. But, we learn nothing from this diagnosis—putting its inaccuracy aside—about those aspects of Lionel Trilling that make him an interesting figure in American letters and education. The author does not employ the imputed condition of attention deficit disorder to demonstrate how it limited Trilling's contribution to his work or how he overcame a handicap in ways others might emulate. Indeed, this essay is little more than sophisticated name-calling directed against a figure with high cultural visibility. As a piece of dabbler's psychiatry, it would have no general interest if the subject were unknown. Its effect—and presumably its purpose—is to cause a stir, not teach a principle.

Second—and for me more damning—is the use of psychiatric diagnoses and interpretations to settle personal scores. This is a hateful

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practice on its face—doubly so for a son to employ against a dead, defenseless father. But it is deplorable for other, more general, reasons. It debases an esteemed cultural figure by claiming to unveil secret mental flaws and unsuspected weaknesses of character. It augments the stigma attached to this mental illness by alleging it engendered an inadequate father, an inadequate teacher, an inadequate man. It demonizes, by caricature, psychiatric formulations by twisting empirical evidence so that nothing falsifies the opinion—Trilling is impulsive when he rages and impulsive when controlled (because his control is then "an intellectual adjustment" to impulsivity). Finally, it misuses psychiatric categories to create stereotypes, an action no more creditable than the old methods of stereotyping people by race, sex, ethnicity, etc.

I have spent a professional lifetime attempting to deter such pseudo-psychiatric practices. That THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR—a publication of our foremost learned society—presents this essay as a worthy product of contemporary thought makes it clear that my own efforts and those who think as I do must continue. Because of this, I have resigned from the editorial board of the magazine.

PAUL R. MCHUGH, M.D.
Director and Psychiatrist-in-Chief
Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences
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As a member of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR's editorial board, I would like to say a word about James Trilling's essay, and about the objections raised by Paul McHugh and others. I found the piece powerfully written, sometimes painful, always engaging; and I think that it offered an enlightening, if deeply personal, view of a major figure in American culture. The retrospective diagnosis of Lionel Trilling as suffering from attention deficit disorder didn't convince me. This seemed a sign of our own times, in which certain forms of medical explanation play the multiple, highly problematic roles in society and culture that Freudian ones played in the fifties, rather than a cogently argued theory. And it's a pity that the article contained at least one factual error, which expert scrutiny could have corrected.

But I don't agree that the piece is nothing more than an effort to settle personal scores. It's a deeply felt effort to come to terms, looking not only backwards, but upwards, from the child's infinitely vulnerable position, with the looming figure of a great adult. Such memoirs—George Orwell's essay "Such, Such Were the Joys" is a greater specimen of the genus—rarely do full justice to their subjects. But they shed a light of their own nonetheless, and they have a place in the tradition of English and American essay writing that the SCHOLAR helps to sustain.

ANTHONY GRAFTON
Dodge Professor of History
Princeton University

Having written about Lionel Trilling myself, I have been interested in the attacks on his son James's memoir by critics who think of themselves as supporting his father. My impression, based on the statements I have seen, is that the self-appointed defenders of Lionel Trilling care less about his writing and his posthumous reputation than about their own agendas, public and private. I will limit myself here to two such defenders: James Bowman, a journalist writing in the *Wall Street Journal* of June 4; and Dr. Paul McHugh, whose resignation from the editorial board of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR over publication of the memoir was covered in the *New York Times* (May 29) and the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (June 4).

Mr. Bowman is disgusted by what he characterizes as the "moral exhibitionism" of Mr. Trilling in revealing aspects of his father's troubled private life and linking those troubles to attention deficit disorder. Mr. Bowman paints a lurid picture of a lackluster son trying to become a "minor celebrity" by exposing his father's inadequacies. Mr. Bowman allows for no ambiguities in his black-and-white representation of James Trilling as an author who "surreptitiously deprives his father of the credit accruing to his intellectual distinction and brings him down to his own level." And that level, in Mr. Bowman's opinion, is pretty low.

This view, that Mr. Trilling has written a "Daddy Dearest" with the aim of destroying his father's reputation, rests on certain assumptions about ADD. Mr. Trilling describes himself as an ADD sufferer, and he doesn't spare the reader details of his own childhood suffering. But his credits as an historian of orna-

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ment and of Byzantine art show clearly that ADD is not incompatible with cultural achievement of a high order. Notwithstanding such achievement, Mr. Bowman associates ADD with all that is grotesque, debased, and stigmatizing. According to that logic, for James to join Lionel Trilling and ADD in the same sentence is to commit a kind of sacrilege.

But Mr. Bowman is not consistent in his understanding of ADD. He can be horrified, but he can also be flippant, as when he dismisses ADD as "the trendiest of the childhood 'learning disabilities' of the 1990s." As the phrasing and quotation marks suggest, Mr. Bowman wants us to be suspicious of this disorder. Mr. Trilling has anticipated such criticism by acknowledging that ADD has been overdiagnosed, especially among young children, but that is a long way from saying that people with neuropsychological conditions are malingerers or otherwise taking advantage of society. The scientific evidence points to the conclusion that these are real handicaps in the real world that is so much more intractable and complex and various (adjectives dear to Lionel Trilling) than Mr. Bowman's simplifications.

Why are the critics of James Trilling so angry? When, in 1993, Lionel's widow, Diana, wrote a book, *The Beginning of the Journey*, in which she revealed her late husband's tendency to depression and verbal violence, hardly anyone complained. But Diana was nearly ninety, and she had become a heroine of feminists by outlasting her husband by twenty years and coming into her own during that time. Perhaps James seems an easier target. In any case, the point seems worth making that the demystification of Lionel Trilling did not begin with his son.

Those who have put themselves forward in this debate as defenders of Lionel live in a Manichaean world of good and evil. They give us, on the one hand, Lionel the moral and intellectual exemplar, and, on the other hand, James the villainous pretender. They are angry at James because, with his allusions to ADD, he threatens their idealization: how can so great a critic as Lionel Trilling have been so erratic in his personal life? What can he possibly have had in common with hyperactive little boys who disrupt grade-school classrooms and wind up in disproportionate numbers in prisons? Suggesting that Trilling may have suffered from ADD is felt to degrade him as a scholar and as a man.

This stereotype belies the great variety of ADD sufferers. James Trilling, as one of those sufferers, must be dismayed by his critics' self-righteous ignorance. The critics, by and large, have been astonishingly ill-informed, but one point must be conceded to them. Mr. Trilling is wonderfully illuminating with regard to his father as a man, but he is very little concerned with Lionel Trilling as an intellectual commenting on the great political and cultural controversies of his time. In a few places, however, he does blur the distinction between the private man and the public intellectual, and in a couple of paragraphs, seized on by several of his opponents, Mr. Trilling does go far toward attributing the substance of his father's ideas to ADD. I can myself imagine that Trilling's cognitive difficulties might have disposed him toward a certain *stance* as a cultural critic. But stance is not substance. ADD is a particular style of cognitive processing and can be employed in the service of many different ideas and political-cultural positions.

In general, it seems to me, this flap is less about Lionel Trilling than about opposing ideas of ADD in our culture. Probably it was the absence of neurological speculation in Diana Trilling's memoirs that accounts for her not having been called to account for "bringing Lionel down to her level." The misunderstanding of her son's project rests on the unwarranted assumption that nobody with ADD could have written as much and as well as his father. James clearly believes that his father might have done more, and done it with less suffering, if he had not had to expend so much energy struggling with his demons. But it is also clear, at least to me, that he does not conceive of that struggle as degrading.

I don't know if Trilling's symptoms meet the diagnostic criteria for ADD, and his son goes too far in stating flatly that his father had this disorder. But the critics are also too literal in arguing that if Lionel can't be proved to have had ADD, his son's memoir is worthless. James Trilling has persuaded me that his father may have had ADD. Certainly the ADD diagnosis makes it possible to understand Lionel Trilling's career in a new way that is compatible with the sense I had of him from his writings

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and from very limited access to information about his life. Take, for example, Trilling's mannered style in person and in his writing. That style, with its "Episcopalian aroma," as John Bayley once described it, has often been attributed to Trilling's desire to run away from his Jewishness. But James offers an alternative (or complementary) way of thinking about that style as deriving from his father's fear and shame about his ADD.

According to James's understanding of his early years, his father was frightened by violent traits in himself that he saw mirrored in his unruly son. His response was to draw back, not rejecting his son but dealing with him in a way that can at best be characterized as ambivalent. He hid his fears behind his famous pose of "Olympian" equanimity, the public image that seeped into his private life as well. James Trilling does not discuss these things to "expose" his father but to understand him and his own past. Because his father was not able to bend to acknowledge his son as like himself, that son, now a man in his early fifties, bends to raise his father up. His gesture is one not of parricide but of reparation. I find the spirit of acceptance and affection in the son's memoir much closer in spirit to Lionel Trilling's own writing than are the op-ed pieces and interviews I have read attacking him.

I want to turn now to Dr. Paul McHugh, a distinguished psychiatrist from whom one might have expected a more objective, disinterested judgment of James Trilling's memoir. If anything, however, Dr. McHugh seems even more agitated than Mr. Bowman. He, too, regards the memoir as worthless, but he takes his stand on the high ground of professional expertise. Mr. Trilling incurs Dr. McHugh's wrath partly because, in the latter's view, he has been making use of psychiatric concepts in an unprofessional and misleading way. As Dr. McHugh told the *Wall Street Journal*, the memoir violates "all the things I think about the proper use of psychiatric knowledge."

Although Dr. McHugh's critique is phrased as a psychiatrist's defense of his profession, he arrives at a judgment of the memoir that is not fundamentally different from that of its non-psychiatric critics: James Trilling's motives are base, malicious, indeed parricidal. Dr. McHugh asserts that Mr. Trilling has used privileged knowledge to get back at his father, a great man in no position to defend himself. James Bowman's op-ed piece quotes Dr. McHugh as saying that James is a celebrity-craving son who wrote his memoir out of "the hostility of condescension," using psychological terms to say, "I know this man (my father) better than he knows himself."

Dr. McHugh accuses Mr. Trilling of misusing psychiatry in offering a diagnosis without having gone through the steps a professional psychiatrist would take. But is Dr. McHugh doing much better when he assigns base motives and character flaws to James Trilling, a man he has never met? The association of ADD with degradation emanates from Dr. McHugh the psychiatrist; it is not present in James Trilling's memoir. Mr. Trilling makes perfectly clear that from his point of view ADD does not, or at least should not, carry a stigma. He represents his father as human, not shameful.

Dr. McHugh has tried to delegitimize the author and discredit his essay, and his anger has had wider ramifications in that he has resigned from this journal's editorial board. But what constitutes "scholarship" in THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR? If we go back to the source, the Harvard Phi Beta Kappa address by Ralph Waldo Emerson after which the journal is named, we see that Emerson himself, with all his erudition, did not take his stand, as does Dr. McHugh, on specialized professional knowledge. Emerson would have understood the difference between an intimate personal memoir and a scientific communication. Emerson, writing as always in the optative mood, hoped the American Scholar would be "Man Thinking," not the professional guarding his turf.

The case against professionalism, simply put, is that it grants to the words of institutionally sanctioned persons greater authority than to the words of those not so situated. That authority is easy to abuse. In general, one sees such abuse whenever anyone seeks to invalidate the inner experience of anyone else; the following would be an example: "No, you are not feeling this; you are feeling that." One expects a little better from a psychiatrist. Instead of trying to enter into James Trilling's self-understanding, Dr. McHugh responds with a blanket denunciation. It is a most curious failure of open-mindedness, or what Lionel Trill-

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ing, following Keats, would have called "negative capability." The oddest thing of all is that, from everything I know of Lionel Trilling, he would have appreciated his son's memoir and understood it to be a communication *to* and not only *about* him. Trilling might have understood his son as saying to him: "It has been a tough fifty years, but I have come through; and now, having survived, I think I understand better what your life was about. Especially, I think I understand better what it was like for you to be my father."

This memoir is a tribute to Lionel Trilling inasmuch as his son displays the dogged will to self-understanding he attributes to his father. It is far more than an argument for a certain medical diagnosis inasmuch as its strength derives not from scientific understanding but from "Man Thinking," the whole man struggling to make sense of his own life's experience. That deeply personal involvement in knowledge almost guarantees that the result will have little of the neatness of textbook knowledge. But what Mr. Trilling has produced, occasionally awkward as it may be, has a virtue highly prized by his father, and that is sincerity. His antagonist, Dr. McHugh, affects great sympathy for the defenseless Lionel Trilling but shows little real interest in him and none at all in Trilling's son, apart from trying to deprive him and his essay of all dignity and credibility.

I believe it is time to end this silliness. It is unbecoming for a prominent psychiatrist to be delivering harangues while demonstrating a tin ear with regard to the text that he presumes to judge. And it is ironic that Mr. Trilling, the object of Dr. McHugh's wrath for practicing psychiatry without a license, should reveal himself to be so much more empathic than the professional healer.

MARK KRUPNICK
Professor of Religion and Literature
Divinity School, University of Chicago
author of Lionel Trilling and the Fate of Cultural Criticism

Though I had an extensive correspondence with Lionel Trilling, and spent three days with him in the year before his death, I knew him principally as the author of essays and books, and the little volume I devoted to him in 1977 derived its insights from a long absorption in his work. Obviously, therefore, I am in no position to challenge the disturbing portrait of the "private" Lionel Trilling offered by his son, James. But I should like to challenge several of the inferences and conclusions that fatally compromise an otherwise moving reminiscence.

The least satisfactory aspect of the memoir is its reliance on attention deficit disorder as a key to understanding not only the moods, the fears, the "rages" of a very complex man, but his very thought processes and ideas. In the reading of his father offered by James Trilling, he asserts again and again that virtually everything one wants to know about Lionel Trilling can be provided by resorting to "the one insight" that resolves whatever uncertainties we may have. This inclination to rely upon a single explanatory "cause" has disfigured much of the psychoanalytic literature, from Freud to the present, and was referred to in appropriately scathing terms by the late psychotherapist Leslie H. Farber as an unfortunate attraction to "the 'aha!' phenomenon." In his effort to account for his father simply as a man with a problem he failed to identify or address, the son reduces his father to a pathetic symptomatology, a figure stripped of the qualities that can alone account for the extraordinary works he produced and the powerful effect he produced on many who knew him better than I. The Freud to whom Lionel Trilling was devoted was, in his later years, resistant—quite as James Trilling describes his father—both to "glamorous insights" and to the myth of a "decisive cure" for conditions that are not generally susceptible to simple cure.

This is not the time, of course, for a debate on the merits of Lionel Trilling's work, but surely it is necessary here to observe that the son, in his commitment to a caricature of "cause," often misrepresents the work. "Why," the son asks, "couldn't he be simply for or against, just once, like everyone else?" The very question reflects, on the one hand, a genuine and long-term exasperation, very human, and, on the other hand, a failure of insight and knowledge, both of them breathtaking in these circumstances. For of course only a child would wish his father, in applying himself to difficult problems, to be "just . . . like everyone else"—when "everyone else" is, as always, likely to miss the point and to "think"

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very much like what Harold Rosenberg once called "the herd of independent minds." And only a very poor reader of Lionel Trilling's work would apply to it the terms of an ADD diagnosis and come up with the conclusion that its author could never be "for or against."

In fact Lionel Trilling was "for" and "against" a great many things, and he was often pilloried for his unmistakable preferences and aversions, for his subtle but often provocative discriminations. When, in his fiction, he satirized fellow travelers and others who had made common cause with leftist movements without adequately thinking through the meaning of their avowals, he was derided by many on the left as a "reactionary" thinker, and he was willing to take the heat. When, in many of his essays, he identified in the enlightened liberalism to which he himself inclined a tendency to deny "the emotions and the imagination"—a tendency to "simplify" in a way that did violence to any reasonable grasp of reality—he carefully set himself against many of those who were otherwise a natural part of his constituency. When he wrote harshly of Dreiser, granted very little to Sherwood Anderson, identified Robert Graves as "a first-rate secondary figure," pronounced *Ethan Frome* "not a great book or even a fine book, but a factitious book," declared David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* "one of the most important books about America to have been published in recent times," and defended the "radical imagination" of Henry James against James's standard political detractors, Lionel Trilling performed the work of criticism as a thinker willing to state his preferences and to defend them strenuously.

For his son to suggest that Trilling was unable to reach conclusions, to focus, to choose, is to promote a gross misrepresentation. "He made it his job," the son writes, "to remind people that there were more than two sides to every question," as if this entailed a corresponding inability to draw conclusions or to make a case. "I doubt," the son writes, "that my father ever solved a problem, in the sense of marshaling evidence to prove or disprove a theory," as if Lionel Trilling had not marshaled large quantities of evidence to instruct us in how to think about sublimation, the relation between art and neurosis, the miseries and confusions associated with the new-found status of "authenticity" in this century, and many other issues—including, one might add, the "issue" presented by those, like the authors of the Kinsey Report, who have "an extravagant fear of all ideas that do not seem . . . to be, as it were, immediately dictated by simple physical fact."

I wonder, in conclusion, what the editor of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR can have been thinking when she wrote, in her strange "Letter from the Editor," that the memoir by James Trilling was "never vengeful" and "marshaled its evidence scrupulously." Is it not "vengeful" to portray one's father as a man inordinately committed to maintaining a façade of Olympian invulnerability and whose triumphs were in the main the product of fortunate circumstances and, in general, "a charmed life"? Only a writer in the grip of a "vengeful" ambition could so entirely fail to appreciate what is entailed in the struggle to produce a first-rate scholarly study, a shapely and strenuously argumentative literary essay, a literary biography that decisively alters the thinking of a generation about an important figure like Matthew Arnold. And what sort of scrupulous evidence is there to warrant the assertion that, as a writer and thinker, Lionel Trilling "never had to take sides"? I see not one whit of evidence for this assertion anywhere in James Trilling's memoir, and so I take the assertion to be, like the editor's corresponding assertions, a reflection of what Lionel Trilling would have called "mental gestures which seek to resemble ideas."

ROBERT BOYERS
Tisch Professor of Arts and Letters
Skidmore College
Editor, Salmagundi
Author, Lionel Trilling: Negative Capability and the Wisdom of Avoidance

I have long admired Lionel Trilling's writing, but I admire James Trilling's courage and honesty more.

Lionel Trilling's work has delighted me since I was a graduate student at Columbia. I arrived there the week he died in 1975 and went on to get my degree in nineteenth-century British literature. I devoted myself to the texts he loved best and found his essays on them more compelling than any other critic's. Leaving graduate school, however, means realizing that life calls for concrete decisions and judgments.

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Ambiguity is fine in the classroom and in essays on literature, but in life—and particularly in bringing up children—it is not the morally appropriate course.

"My Father and the Weak-Eyed Devils" is proof that intellectual ideas really do evolve as they encompass "more life" (as Henry James would say). What James Trilling writes in his revelatory and graceful essay is the by-product of what his father wrote—only with more experience added. I believe that had Lionel Trilling been given time to contemplate this idea, he would have come to see this.

PAULA MARANTZ COHEN
Professor of Humanities and Director of Literature
Drexel University

The elegance and restraint of James Trilling's essay render his achievement nonpareil. His artistry recapitulates in the reader's consciousness the process it represents: with each turn of the kaleidoscope of inter-generational memory and personal experience that Trilling applies to the conundrum of ADD, the reader's understanding comes more sharply into focus. With understanding comes empathy; to read this essay is to re-experience the author's own healing.

With astonishing precision Trilling has grasped the axes of reason and memory to graph the exact point where the curves of compassion and dispassion intersect. His portrait of his father achieves the profoundly moving realism of a great artist—in Iris Murdoch's phrase, "It is essentially both pity and justice."

MAUD GLEASON
Department of Classics
Stanford University

The *New York Times* has quoted Dr. McHugh as saying that James Trilling's piece is a form of "sophisticated name calling" that "uses psychiatric principles to settle personal scores."

James Trilling writes in his essay: "My father's response to my difficulties was stranger than my mother's. He knew his own behavior, he knew his father's, and he knew mine, but he never took me aside, at six or sixteen, and told me he knew how it felt because he had been through it himself." *This* is name-calling? A benighted son settling a score?

Dr. McHugh seems to believe that only doctors, not family members, have the authority to make psychological interpretations of family matters. This constitutes the bureaucratizing of the most personal aspects of human life, and it is inimical to the very dedication to learning and self-knowledge that Phi Beta Kappa stands for.

Might Dr. McHugh have been thinking that, with James Trilling's medical and psychological history, he couldn't possibly be a credible source on anything, let alone on the unimpeachable cultural icon of Lionel Trilling?

GREGORY LUDWIG
Highland Lakes, New Jersey

James Trilling's memoir was not an indictment of his father but the liberation of a longtime victim of the attempt to classify a medical disorder as psychological. None of us can ever really know our parents, but we have to make a stab at it. At age fifty, James has that right.

PATRICIA LIEVOW
Rockland, Maine

Describing the wretched family drama from which he emerged, James Trilling shows the same eye for complexity and tragedy his father had, or had when contemplating the lives and works of others (seldom his own). The Lionel Trilling who doesn't, won't, can't see the recurring pattern in the rages of grandfather, father, and son; who lets the remedy slip from his hands, and his wife's hands; who denies it to himself and his son—these in their way are piteous and terrible things, even if they don't occur on a stage where blood flows and kingdoms fall. I write in admiration of Jim's style, at least as lucid and graceful as his father's; of his courage, which so greatly exceeds his father's; of his amazing ability to set forth the intricate web of a story that is also, horribly and embarrassingly, his own. Jim didn't get much affection and he doesn't return much—fair enough, although there's a touching little ray of it in the end of his narrative. What he does give back, in unrequited plenty, is understanding: a judicious attentiveness. This is an unusual, instructive, and sadly beautiful document that will be read when Jim's critics, with their concerns for turf or for silence, are forgotten, or remembered as a chuckle in a footnote. THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR deserves thanks and admiration for printing it.

I write, also, in sympathy. Jim is my friend and

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my perspective is somewhat like his: I too was the late-born only child of liberal intellectuals, a private afterthought in the public lives of an academic-cum-journalist couple quite obliviously engrossed in their careers and admirers, in each other, and (in the case of my father, Owen Lattimore) in himself. With us, too, there was a public and civil façade that had to be maintained. My father's alcoholism went untreated and, after my mother's death, nearly destroyed him. So here, too, was treatment denied.

Jim's detractors write as if he had diagnosed ADD in his father with a pretense of scientific conclusiveness. On the contrary, he states of his father that being now "beyond help, he is also beyond proof. The question of whether he had ADD has become both academic and insoluble." But "some circumstantial evidence," as Thoreau said, "is very strong, as when you find a trout in the milk." Jim's quarrel with his father is not, however, that his father was ill; that was, rather, a mitigating circumstance. Jim's quarrel with his father was that Lionel, while pretending wisdom and humanity, mistreated him—gave him not bread but a stone.

Lionel Trilling once wrote—correctly enough, for the time (1949)—that "a large part of the intellectual, liberal bourgeoisie no longer dislikes authoritarianism if only it is not called by its right name." Of course Lionel was thinking of Marxism, which he had earlier himself recanted. By that time his weak-eyed devils had led him on from Marx to Freud, without his perceiving the authoritarian continuity. Jim tells me that his parents preached to him constantly against ideology. Yet Lionel, the humanist, the man of probing, complex mind, had once again identified with the aggressor: an ideology fully accoutered with enforced orthodoxy and rigid praxis. Freudianism, moreover, for all its own complexity, included an extreme simplification—the assumption, in the mature Freudian theory, that while the psyche (as in hysteria) affects the body, the body doesn't affect the psyche—which in those days ruled out bodily, chemical treatment for ailments with psychic or behavioral symptoms.

Trilling the Elder rightly balked at the modernist and New Critical notion of artistic impersonality. "We are no longer required," he said, "to regard as wholly fortuitous the fact that the hero of Proust's novel is named Marcel." Jim has his father's blessing, in principle, for putting together the authorial and the real Lionel, who still deserves interest.

DAVID LATTIMORE
Professor Emeritus
East Asian Studies and Comparative Literature
Brown University

I am amazed at the polarity of reactions to the article, for Mr. Bowman's outrage in the *Wall Street Journal* and Paul McHugh's outrage as reported by the *New York Times* both seem to ignore what, despite personal conflict and deficiencies in paternal interest, can be taken as a compassionate and understanding view of a difficult and, yes, brilliant person.

Given that, and given the underlying pathos reflected in the Trillings' lives, it is preposterous to believe that James's writing, as Mr. Bowman puts it, "deprives his father of the credit accruing to his intellectual distinction." Lionel Trilling is, by any measure, still a giant of his time and his calling. Without even inferring the existence of a medical condition, I believe it reasonable to conclude that Lionel Trilling found academe a congenial and receptive place in which to prosper—as he might not have in a more prescriptive environment.

As for Dr. McHugh, it may well be that, given the fragile underpinnings of psychiatric "science" and the easy recourse to Ritalin for ADD, his overly defensive behavior expresses a need to offset latent self-skepticism with self-justification.

I am appalled by the negativity and ferocity of such responses. Three cheers for the imagination and reach of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR.

BOB KRUH
Professor of Chemistry Emeritus
Kansas State University

The *New York Times* has reported that a member of the AMERICAN SCHOLAR's editorial board has resigned in protest over not having been allowed, as a psychiatrist, to vet James Trilling's memoir of his parents before its publication in the Spring issue.

I agree with the dissenter's conclusion that the younger Trilling is tossing about jargon glibly and flattening his complex, fascinating, admittedly difficult parents down to a set of symptoms. However, the ex-member's objec-

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tion boils down to a turf fight—that as the credentialed one, *he* has the sole prerogative to toss about jargon glibly, etc. I further object to his patronizing assumption that the mere laypersons among THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR readership need an M.Deity-in-residence to protect us from the opportunity to weigh the article; apply the full breadth of our intelligence, learning, and experience; and decide for ourselves.

A. C. WILLMENT
Ridgewood, New Jersey

James Trilling replies: I would like to thank all those who read my essay with open minds, and who did not let reverence for my father's legendary complexity obscure the fact that complexity is a two-way street. They accept that the famous understander deserves to be understood, that the addition of new complexities does not invalidate the old, and that I would not, probably could not, have written about my father as I did if he had not been my first and most valued teacher.

Certain letters, on both sides, demand special mention. Mark Krupnick brings disinterested, authoritative common sense to a situation that has generated more than its share of unreason. David Lattimore, with a poet's gift, allows me to see my own life, and my telling of it, through the eyes of another. A. C. Willment and Anthony Grafton have earned my thanks for their sense of fair play. Speaking up for those whose ideas one rejects is a virtue more widely praised than practiced. Ms. Willment's sharp-edged defense of my right to be heard is particularly invigorating. Finally, in ugly contrast to this spirit of tolerance, Paul McHugh and Robert Boyers are outraged that my essay ever saw the light of day.

Dr. McHugh, who resigned from this magazine's editorial board because he was not given the chance to exercise prior restraint, charges me no fewer than eight times with crimes against psychiatry: "ignorance of diagnostic methods," "dabbler's psychiatry," and so on. Has he mistaken my memoir for an amateur's misguided attempt to patch together a clinical study? I wrote about what I know intimately: my own life, many years of my father's life (I was twenty-seven when he died), and how it feels to have attention deficit disorder. I do not believe that only someone with firsthand experience of a phenomenon is qualified to write about it, but I would not like to think that firsthand experience actually disqualifies me!

Where the story crosses into medical territory the rules change: I write as a layman, and welcome correction on matters of scientific fact. Indeed, I am grateful to Dr. McHugh for pointing out one such error. In describing the effects of Dexamyl, a medication my parents took, I state that neither of its active ingredients is physically addictive. As Dr. McHugh rightly points out, amobarbital is addictive, dangerously so. I had my misinformation from a psychiatrist, and assumed that such matters were too well known in the profession to require checking. The fault is mine, and I regret it.

Setting me right on substantive issues is well within Dr. McHugh's professional mandate. Denouncing the whole enterprise ex cathedra is not. When I speak of a disorder that I believe has plagued my family for three generations, Dr. McHugh closes his ears—but feels free to castigate me for using "psychiatric diagnoses and interpretations to settle personal scores." What scores? On what basis does he claim to grasp my motives, while denying me the right to understand those of my own father? The only basis I can imagine is that he is a medical professional, while I belong to the underclass of laymen, of patients. Like A. C. Willment and others, I find the conclusion inescapable: Dr. McHugh's pious crusade against "pseudo-psychiatric practices" conceals a ruthless defense of his professional privilege.

As for Professor Boyers, he appears driven by the desire to shield my father from a dreadful posthumous injury. The suggestion that Lionel Trilling had ADD is, for him, an assault, to be resisted tooth and nail. The heart of his response is that "the son reduces his father to a pathetic symptomatology, a figure stripped of the qualities that alone can account for the extraordinary works he produced." What are these mysterious "qualities" on which my father's reputation depends, and which the diagnosis of ADD negates with such finality? Certainly not his ideas, his writing, or his magic as a teacher: the diagnosis not only leaves these things intact, but makes them more impressive for being achieved against previously unsuspected odds. I fear that Professor Boyers, and others of my

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father's devotees, have invested more heavily in Lionel Trilling's image than in his ideals. The only "quality" of my father's that really does vanish like smoke is the façade of self-mastery, which he himself knew to be a sham.

What I fear even more is that the rush to "defend" my father has less to do with his own reputation than with the reputation of ADD and other neurologically based learning disabilities. Although as a psychiatrist he should know better, Dr. McHugh evidently agrees with Professor Boyers that ADD is not a diagnosis but an accusation. Why else would he berate me for *choosing* "the trendy category, attention deficit disorder, to pin on . . . a serious and brilliant man of letters"?

If it is anathema to suggest that "a serious and brilliant man of letters" suffered from a minor neurological disorder, the message is clear: a person may have a mind or a disorder, but not both. This deeply ignorant assumption will bring pain and discouragement to anyone who is trying to come to terms with a learning disability, and justified anger to anyone who has struggled, with or without medical help, to overcome a handicap. I first learned about ADD from a first-person account in a magazine, and one of my reasons for writing as I did was to return the favor by helping others recognize this elusive yet damaging condition. The need was greater than I could have imagined.

WHAT DO YOU KNOW?

Arthur Krystal's call for a greater respect for knowledge is wonderful, but I was left uncertain about the sort of knowledge and the nature of the community he envisions. Why is it that "something is wrong" when "one person's bread and butter is another person's arcana"? All personal knowledge is arcane. And most intellectual gain—knowledge gathered by reflective attention, study, handling with the mind—is essentially personal. Krystal's "knowledge" seems at moments to be a mere matter of initiation rites. A few minutes in one's formative years will suffice to create "Tolstoy" as a referent recognized for life. To be even slightly changed by Bolkonsky's view of the sky at Austerlitz, on the other hand, is to gain a morsel of Tolstoy-knowledge that is not easily communicated, requires some involvement, and may not be the same from one reader to the next. The common ground that we need is the common recognition, appreciation, and pursuit of such gains, not a shared recitation of the places where others have made them. One is reminded of the confusion among some bird-watchers between the knowledge of birds and the knowledge of the names humans have given them. The bird's the thing.

AMOS ORLOFSKY
New Rochelle, New York

THE TRUE HEALERS

As a physician who has practiced medical oncology in a community setting for many years, I read Sherwin Nuland's Spring column with some bemusement. I agree that medical schools need to place more emphasis on teaching. I also welcome a trend in medical school admissions that looks favorably on the liberal arts major. But Dr. Nuland's proposal that we create "departments of medical humanities" within our medical schools strikes me as a misguided idea. His proposal springs from the assumption that exposing medical students to great works of literature and philosophy will somehow make them more compassionate doctors. This idea seems to crop up every ten years or so when some well-meaning (and well-read) physician decides that one reason he or she is such a good doctor is because of a love for "great books." For example, in 1978, Dr. Lewis Thomas declared in the *New England Journal of Medicine* that the best way to prepare for a career in medicine was to master Greek.

Without denying the pleasures and critical insights to be drawn from such study, I fear there is no correlation between being exposed to the humanities and being a humanitarian. I agree with Harold Bloom that "reading deeply in the Canon will not make one a better or a worse person, a more useful or a more creative citizen." Neither will it make one a better doctor.

I base this conclusion upon two types of evidence. First, through my wife, an English professor, I have had extensive contact with people intensively trained in the humanities. Some of these people are as cruel, self-cen-

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tered, nasty, and unsympathetic as one is likely to find anywhere. The second kind of evidence I would present here is more profound. As a medical oncologist, I take care of many terminally ill patients who need the concern and tenderness that we would all want from a health care provider. The people who provide this best and most unselfishly are the nurses. These inspiring women—and they are mostly women—whom I see toiling on the wards and in my office are not as a group particularly well educated in the humanities; some of them wouldn't know Homer from Homer Simpson.

So if exposure to the humanities does not produce the compassionate, empathetic physician that we all want, what does? I suspect it is some combination of temperament, family life, and religious and/or moral instruction that creates these individuals long before they reach adolescence. The trick is for medical school admissions committees to identify these applicants and to make these qualities part of their criteria for admission. Perhaps we should use some of the money that Dr. Nuland would earmark for medical humanities departments to find new ways of screening medical school applicants for these "human" qualities. Barring this, medical schools might change their curricula to demand that all their students spend a year or two in nursing school or working as nurses' aides.

Education in the humanities can provide pleasures that all human beings, not just doctors, should be exposed to. But it seems wrong to confuse these pleasures with moral values.

Alan S. Penziner, M.D.
Wilmington, New Jersey

Sherwin B. Nuland replies: I would have thought it abundantly clear from my essay that the absence of humanities in the medical curriculum worries far more than the occasional book-loving but misguided doctor whose fanciful notions "crop up every ten years or so." Governing bodies responsible for the education and clinical training of physicians have not only recognized the seriousness of the deficiency, but have been grappling with possible solutions for decades. The dilemma is not *whether* but *how* to implant such influences into our training programs. Mine is only one more of those *hows* to be put forward.

That some English majors are "cruel, self-centered, nasty, and unsympathetic" is undeniable, as is the observation that many nurses are the opposite. But what this has to do with the purported futility of exposing embryonic doctors to the humanities is a mystery to me, and hardly passes muster as "evidence" of the conclusion stated with such QED certainty in the first sentence of Dr. Penziner's penultimate paragraph. I don't doubt that a better selection process is critical, but so are other factors in the complex mix that ultimately determines a matured physician's compassion and understanding. The best of admissions screening will not prevent the science-obsessed process of today's clinical and laboratory training from leaching a great deal of the *humanitas* out of the idealistic young people who have always been enrolled in our medical schools, especially when that process has the currently constituted seven to twelve years in which to work its insidious way into their daily doings. Even those most favored by that "combination of temperament, family life, and religious and/or moral instruction" so correctly emphasized by Dr. Penziner will be affected to some degree.

It is the contention of the Thomases, the Nulands, and the majority of American medical educators that over-long isolation of students and trainees from the surrounding culture and its humanistic values is at the heart of much of the problem. Others may in time come up with far more practicable solutions than mine, but there appears to be a consensus that the issue must be addressed—and soon.

THE REAL TURTLE SOUP

I believe the "nicely turned Porter line" you wished to apply was "merely the mock" and not "only the mock."

Susan L. Feldman
San Francisco, California

Jacob Stein replies: Ms. Feldman is correct; it was "merely the mock." Please tell her that I will meet her in Asbury Park.

Please send letters to The American Scholar, *1785 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Fourth Floor, Washington, D.C. 20036, or e-mail them to* scholar@pbk.org. *Letters may be edited for length and clarity.*

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The Podium

Is the Universe Designed?

It used to be obvious that the world was designed by some sort of intelligence. What else could account for fire and rain and lightning and earthquakes? Above all, the wonderful capabilities of living things seemed to point to a creator with a special interest in life. Today we understand most of these things in terms of physical forces acting under impersonal laws. There do not seem to be any exceptions to this natural order, any miracles. Though the great monotheistic faiths are founded on miracle stories, the evidence seems to me considerably weaker than the evidence for cold fusion, and I don't believe in cold fusion.

It may be improbable in any one case for unplanned evolution to produce conscious intelligent beings, but our sample is biased by the fact that it is only in these fortunate cases that there is anyone making such calculations. The universe is very large, and it should be no surprise that, among the enormous number of planets that support only unintelligent life and the still vaster number that cannot support life at all, there is some tiny fraction on which there are living beings who are capable of thinking about the universe, as we are doing here.

—STEVEN WEINBERG

I believe that science is possible—that the universe is rationally beautiful and transparent to us—because the physical world is a creation and we are, to use an ancient and powerful phrase, creatures "made in the image" of the Creator. I regard this insight as the primary ground for believing that the universe is designed. I make no apology for speaking in theistic terms, for if the universe is designed, who could be its designer other than a Creator-God?

One of the considerations relevant to this question is the most astonishing (and most significant) event known to us that has happened since the Big Bang. I refer, of course, to the dawning of self-consciousness here on Earth (and perhaps elsewhere). In us, the universe has become aware of itself. You remember that Blaise Pascal said that human beings are thinking *reeds*, so insubstantial on the grand scale of the cosmos, but we are *thinking* reeds, and so greater than all the stars, for we know them and ourselves and they know nothing.

—JOHN POLKINGHORNE

Steven Weinberg, Professor of Physics and Astronomy at the University of Texas at Austin, won the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1979. John Polkinghorne, a former theoretical physicist, is an Anglican priest who served as President of Queens' College, Cambridge. These remarks are taken from talks delivered on April 15, 1999, at the National Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C., at a conference on Cosmic Questions organized by the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

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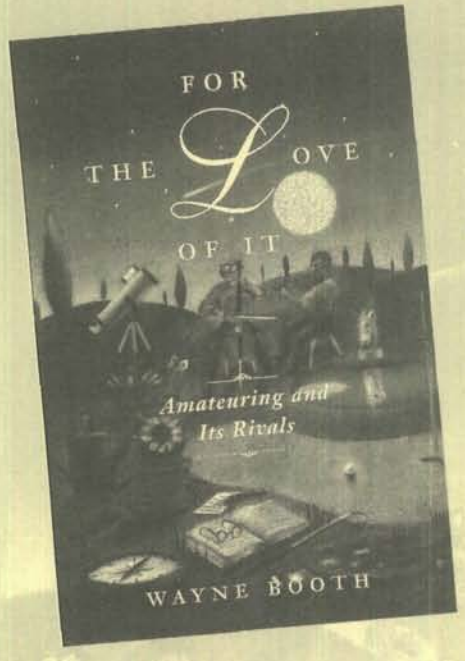

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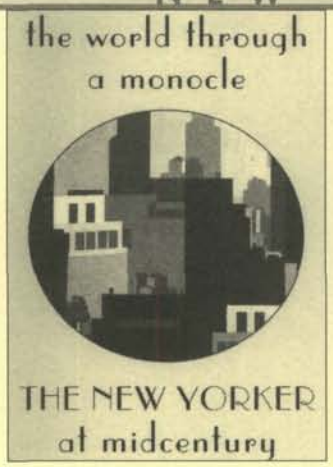

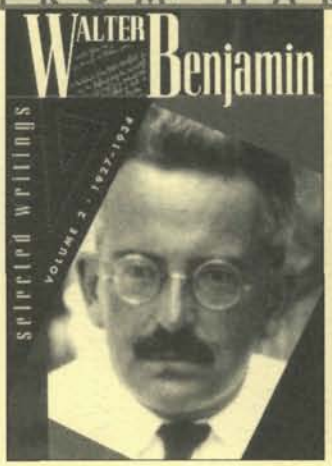

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